

In Christ — Called to Witness

在基督裡 — 蒙召作見證



The Lutheran World Federation  
**Ninth Assembly**  
Hong Kong 1997  
**Report**

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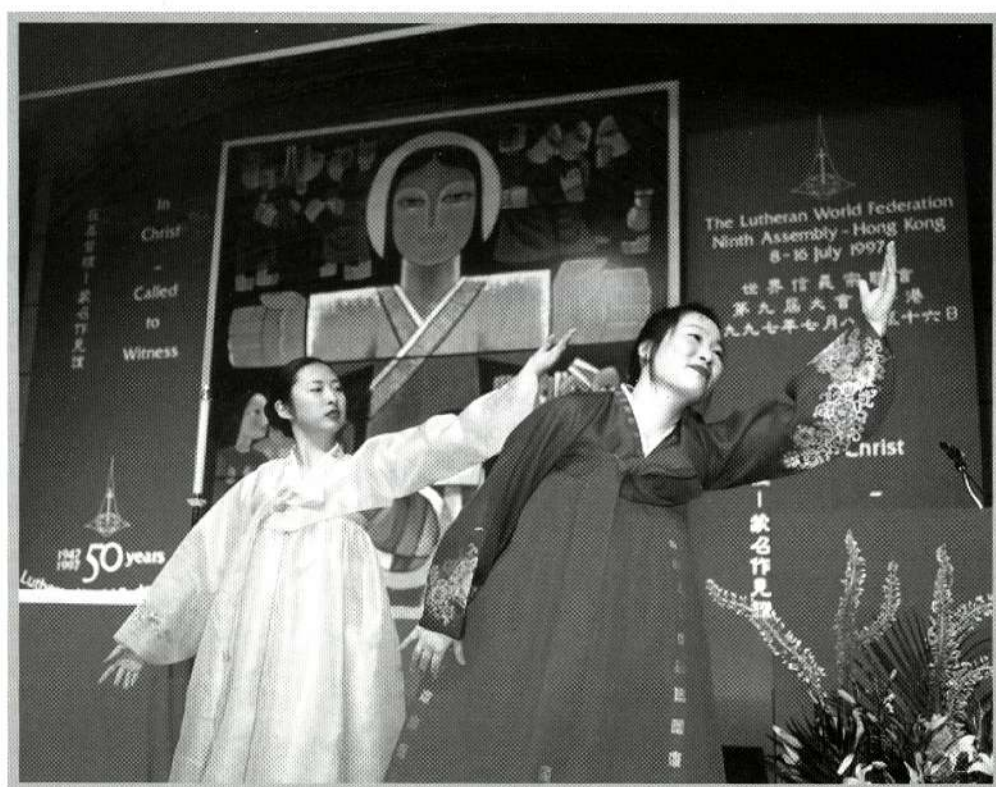
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# OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE NINTH ASSEMBLY OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Hong Kong, 8-16 July 1997

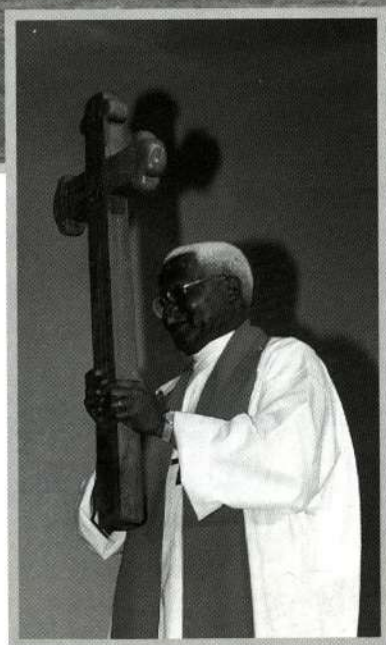
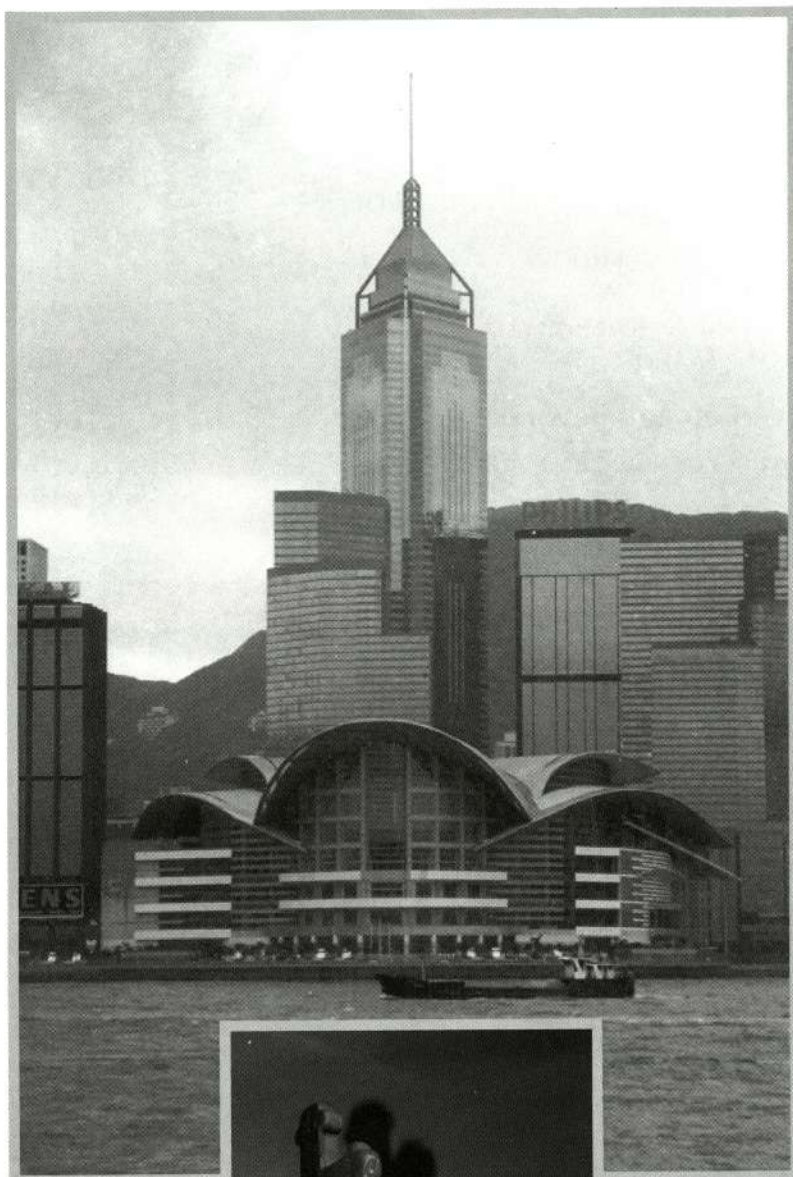


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## FOREWORD

*Ishmael Noko*

Many people today wonder whether worldwide church assemblies are still needed. You may be one of those many individuals who have attended several such global events and have at the end wondered whether these events are the best ways of doing the church's business. Could the results of these gatherings not have been reached without incurring such high costs – in money and time? It is a concern for many that the decisions made at these gatherings are insufficiently received by the member churches as their own. The reams of paper that are turned out at these meetings are a reminder also that we have indeed lost our environmental awareness. However, if doubt is expressed about these events it should clearly be stated that it is one of *style* and not about the *necessity* of assemblies.

It ought to be remembered that the church is by nature an assembly (*ekklesia*). Assemblies are, therefore, a structural necessity for the church to be church. The Lutheran World Federation is a *communion* of churches that are themselves *assembled* in worship in their localities and therefore require representative *assemblies* at various levels including a global level. Such assemblies are necessary also for joint counsel and action. They are a concrete expression of the unity of the church for which we are searching; they are fora for eucharistic fellowship – a place and an opportunity for healing, sharing and mutual



strengthening of the spiritual bonds that exist among the people of God.

On July 8, 1997, a week after Hong Kong left British dependency, delegates from 122 Lutheran churches around the world gathered for the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, China. This was an historic assembly for a number of reasons:

- a) it was the last in this century,
- b) the LWF celebrated its 50th anniversary since its formation in 1947, and
- c) it was the first such Lutheran global meeting in the continent of Asia.

It was an impressive moment to see hundreds upon hundreds of participants from about 70 countries, guided by the Assembly theme *In Christ: Called to Witness*. This theme was a reminder of the theme of the Eighth Assembly seven years ago in Curitiba, Brazil – *I Have Heard the Cry of My People*. We departed from Curitiba fully convinced that we had heard what God wanted us to know about God's gracious plan for this world – our home village. In Hong Kong we heard God's Word of invitation to be a *witness* in a world marked by complex factors such as unprecedented technological advances; communal tensions; racism; disregard for human rights; increasing poverty; religious intolerance; exploitation of children; neglect of the older generations, etc. In the context of such a global setting the Ninth Assembly delegates



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sought the guidance of God through the Holy Spirit to articulate for their time and age the profound implication of this theme.

The presence of so many people from different cultures, church environments and nationalities was in itself a vivid reminder of the conciliar dimension of such an assembly. The greetings brought by ecumenical guests were an affirmation of the LWF as a partial expression of the church universal. Delegates and official guests committed themselves to a future marked by joint action in many spheres of church life. A careful reading of this volume will give the reader sufficient information about the kind of programs the LWF member churches are likely to give priority in the next seven years.

The daily business began with worship and Bible studies organized on regional bases: Africa, Asia, Central Eastern Europe, Central Western Europe, Latin and Central America, North America and the Nordic region. Each region presented a Bible study to illustrate how the selected passage has been experienced in that particular region. The assembly could experience the cultural diversity and flavor in the Lutheran communion.

The content of the assembly was discussed in ten village groups. Every official participant was assigned to a village. The villages served as homes for every participant from which they had the opportunity to "influence," as it were, the outcome of the Assembly. At the village level participants had the opportunity to share with one another the life stories from their church, nation, etc. They reflected together on the theme, on lectures presented in the plenaries, and on special issues of common interest.

Another feature of the assembly was the celebration of the 50 years of the LWF. On Sunday, July 13, some 5,000 people gathered for a worship service. The majority of the people came from the churches in Hong Kong. It was a "display" of what happens when the gospel takes root in different cultural contexts. The content and liturgy of the service can best be described as a doxology to God's grace. The Lutheran World Federation brings into fellowship churches from nations — some with memories of fresh wounds and scars due to wars or conflicts with one another during this century. Through God's grace and through the sharing of the common faith in Christ, they are constituted into one body.

The present volume of the report of the assembly is a formal record of addresses, sermons, commitments, resolutions and public statements. Assembly minutes will appear as a separate document. Both the report and the minutes are an extremely important *aide-mémoire* for the LWF Council and the member churches as they seek to define areas of joint action in God's mission.

I want to thank each and everyone who contributed to this assembly — member churches, staff of the Federation, the outgoing president and the council and committee members, those who attended in the category of "elders of the Federation," former general secretaries of the LWF, ecumenical guests, press and many others who accepted different kinds of leadership roles. Gratitude is also expressed to the host churches in Hong Kong who went out of their way to provide the groundwork for a good assembly and to the Chinese state authorities for expediting all the necessary entry formalities.

## THE LWF FROM CURITIBA



## TO HONG KONG





## ADDRESS BY THE LWF PRESIDENT

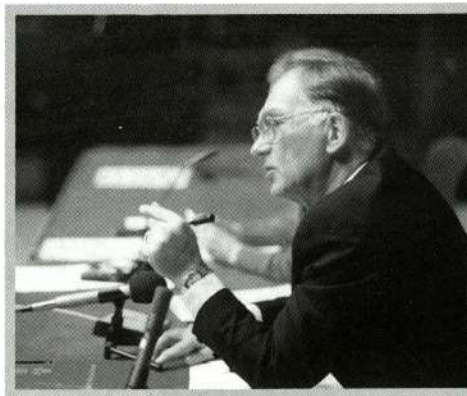
*"SO THAT GOD MAY BE  
GLORIFIED IN ALL THINGS..."  
(1 PETER 4:11)*

*Gottfried Brakemeier*

### *Introduction*

"Churches visit churches"—this could also be the heading for this Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Of course, there is business to be dealt with, but it would be a gross misunderstanding if we were to consider our gathering to be purely a business meeting. Even a cursory glance at the agenda confirms this. We celebrate worship together, we commemorate a 50th anniversary, we read biblical texts together, we deliberate on urgent contemporary issues, we hear something about the world of our sisters and brothers in this city, in this country and in this region. First and foremost, our Assembly is an encounter during which hopefully something will happen similar to what the apostle Paul expected of his planned visit to Rome, namely that we will be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:12).

Since the Lutheran World Federation is a guest in Hong Kong, the first words should be addressed to our hosts of whom there are many. First of all, there are the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation to which we owe the invitation to this city and which have taken the trouble to prepare the infrastructure needed for an event such as this one. Our deepest thanks



*The Rev. Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier  
President of the Lutheran World  
Federation*

*Professor for New Testament at the  
Lutheran Theological Seminary in  
São Leopoldo, Brazil*

go to them. It might be useful to remind ourselves that the Lutheran World Federation as such has no permanent home on this earth. As it is present wherever its member churches are located, this city is also its home. This perception, along with the kind reception we experienced, give us the feeling that we do not come as strangers, and that is a good feeling.

The circle of hosts is even larger, comprising all Christian churches both in this city and in this country. We greet the whole Christian oikumene and give thanks for the support and the signs of unity based on the name of Jesus Christ.

Our visit should be seen within this larger parameter as well. Ecumenical thinking and acting is part of our

Lutheran heritage. Our oneness in Christ transcends all possible differences. This is the spirit that brings us together.



1947  
1997 **50 years**  
Lutheran World Federation

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Last, but not least, the city itself is among the hosts, the authorities, the people in this country. We are happy that this gathering can take place here and now. It is a sign of openness, a commendable courtesy and a clear international commitment which sees today's affairs from a global perspective. A few days ago, Hong Kong was politically re-integrated into continental China even though for the time being the city will retain a special status. Another chapter of colonial history has come to an end. It is to be hoped that isolation will thus be overcome, and a new historical era based on peace and justice may begin.

We are visitors in this city. I will try to explain this visit a little bit by reflecting on the questions of who we are, what moves us and what we want.

#### *Who we are*

I do not hesitate to call the Lutheran World Federation an experiment testing an unusual concept. Since its Assembly in Budapest, the Federation no longer understands itself as a free association of churches but as a communion of churches, which was confirmed in a constitutional amendment adopted in 1990 in Curitiba. Admittedly, the concept of communion is not a new one. We encounter it already in the New Testament, and it is used in the Apostles' Creed as "communion of saints." In recent times, "koinonia" has become the overall ecumenical goal. Nevertheless, the determined attempt of the Lutheran World Federation to implement communion at a global level is an ambitious project. De facto, it has defined itself as a worldwide congregation, for communion needs to take shape in a congregation, and the very nature of the congregation is communion. Allow me a few brief comments on the significance of the resolution.

1. "Koinonia" has become a question of the survival of humanity. The future will depend on whether ways can be found to translate the conflicts between and the mere coexistence of peoples and groups into a harmonious and sustainable togetherness. For better or for worse, human beings are forced to get on with one another. Without communion no peace, without justice no sustainability.

The Lutheran World Federation's *communio* concept has a symbolic meaning in this context. Based on its own preconditions, it attempts to establish community and enable commonality. It should not be accused of setting new boundaries as a Lutheran community. It is true that the Lutheran confession is the basis that enables and sustains the communion; communion cannot exist without such a premise. It is decisive that such a communion remain able to achieve community beyond itself.

This has always been the self-understanding of the Lutheran World Federation which has always lived *its* communion, and in so doing has had the privilege of overcoming considerable internal obstacles. At the same time, towards the outside, it strove for ecumenical understanding and reconciliation. The Lutheran World Federation is no arbitrary association nor is it a fundamentalist sect. It has no need for enemy images to maintain the loyalty of its members. What is at stake is the newness of human relations.

The Lutheran World Federation is certainly not alone in pursuing this goal. It is committed to many partners. Even though, admit-



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tedly, it has not been spared disappointments, it can thankfully look back on many positive experiences in this "community project." In any case, it is aware that giving priority to "those of the family of faith" of whom the apostle Paul speaks, does not exclude but includes service to all human beings (Galatians 6:10).

2. If there is to be communion among human beings, then an already given community must be recognized. Ultimately, communion is not a human construct, but a gift. This is what distinguishes true communion from a mere community of interests. The latter will survive only as long as the individual or group interests converge. As soon as they drift apart, the community breaks up and conflicts arise. *Koinonia* needs a more stable foundation.

The Lutheran World Federation confesses Jesus Christ as the only foundation of its communion. The Christian church knows that it is sustained by the mercy he shows to the weak and the guilty. It recognizes the "loving kindness of God" (Titus 3:4) in his words, his acts, his life as well as his claim to his creature. We are not left alone in the world. God forgives us our trespasses, gives us the right to life and dignity, and justifies by faith alone. His love becomes our obligation. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female. Before him and in him we are all one (Galatians 3:28), that is a communion of imperfect and yet blessed human beings.

The Lutheran confession insists on the very miracle of God's mercy and has tried to protect it from any curtailments. The churches live

from this source. Our question is: Is there a stronger bond uniting humankind than this? Not everybody knows or confesses Christ, but they also are entitled to his mercy. We are a community in the East and the West, in the North and the South, even though we fail or refuse to recognize it. What we should simply do is make visible the God-given communion, to the glory of God and the salvation of humankind.

3. This is difficult, also for us in the Lutheran World Federation. For very human reasons, it is not easy to live communion. Frequently, Christians stand in the way of their own witness. They also need renewed forgiveness of their guilt. Moreover, there are external obstacles, limited resources, and hatred and war that often render the work difficult. As in the case of Jesus, God's mercy is often met with suspicion and resistance, and it is often a jealous fighting over privileges that is at stake. Jesus was nailed to the cross for a reason. Finally, it must be said that many issues concerning the global communion have not yet been fully discussed and settled.

What are the structures a communion of churches at the global level should have? If the local church has problems with the diversity of its members, then the global community does even more so. According to the Curitiba Message, the Lutheran World Federation defines itself as a spiritual, a sacramental, a confessional and a serving communion. This is quite remarkable but does not mean — and perhaps rightly so — an administrative and structural communion because the conditions in the member churches are too diverse to be brought under

a unified organizational umbrella. Nevertheless, the question of structure is not an irrelevant one that needs to be followed up in the future.

It seems to me that once again the Lutheran World Federation is on the front line in testing a concept. Communion must leave room for diversity while striving to integrate it. What needs to be dismantled are not necessarily the differences, but the conflicts they potentially cause. What is at stake is reconciled diversity. Structural forms need to be found that can combine freedom and communion. Communion without freedom becomes dictatorship; freedom without communion ends in arbitrariness. A communion is no penitentiary, but a place where freedom is experienced in the bond created by love. The Lutheran World Federation is not alone faced with the question of how to give structural expression to this insight. It is the ecumenical issue *per se*.

The Lutheran World Federation is an experiment that has not yet been finalized. But we are invited to join in this process. In turn, it manifests a readiness to join others who are striving for ways to find community. Communion is not optional, but necessary even when the path is strewn with stones.

#### *What moves us*

1. Jesus of Nazareth was a fighter for the faith — the true faith, of course. Not every faith is salutary. Faith determines behavior. It moves mountains (Matthew 17:20) and decides on the weal and woe of humankind, not least on the ability to show solidarity and communion. At the beginning of the third Christian millennium, the situation of faith in our world gives rise to serious concern.

Innumerable human beings have lost their faith. As a rule, what remains is merely the pleasure of the moment. The responsibility for tomorrow's world and the solidarity among peoples have been lost. The secular world is helpless in the face of the questions of ethics and can only offer meaning in the form of consumption. Consumerism is the new drug, the opium of postmodern times. Colossal frustration spreads and looks for a substitute for lost values.

Religious offerings thrive in this soil. They create an explicitly polytheistic world. Secularism and the new religiosity do not get in each other's way since faith has been degraded to a private matter. Religious pluralism makes up the picture, not excluding the secular confessions. Neoliberalism, for instance, is more than merely an economic doctrine. It is a faith system with the typical features of such. It is so dominant that faith is increasingly degraded to a market issue compelling churches and religious communities to become "competitive" and not shy away from abandoning the truth, for, in the marketplace, it is not truth but power that is victorious.

Perhaps this is the reason for the worldwide growth of religious fanaticism. At a time of brittle foundations, it seeks salvation by desperately maintaining and reviving traditions for whose crises it seeks scapegoats to be eliminated, if necessary by force. This time, too, power wins over truth. One type of fundamentalism is pitched against another and merges with political and cultural conflicts. Is this the "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4)?



Common sense will protest against marketing faith and subjecting ethics to the law of supply and demand. No religion that has any claim to the truth can have a vested interest in the present chaos of faith or religious wars. Meeting and talking about faith has become very urgent. We need a consensus in faith.

This is true for churches and denominations, which in order to be credible must prove their unity in Christ, and it is also true for religions and cultures. Fighting each other should finally be a thing of the past. Although there is a common human responsibility for the world, there is also the need to discover commonalities. The commitment to the truth does not allow us to dismiss differences lightly. This does not bring us any further. We should have the courage to open up our faith to discussion, to learn from one another and to reflect together which faith shows us the *Himmelsrichtung*, i.e., the direction or "way to heaven" and at the same time to human beings. Faith must turn out to be salutary for it has to do with wisdom. Our witness will have to substantiate why we recognize God's wisdom in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30).

2. The Lutheran World Federation is, furthermore, moved by the concern for the humanity of humankind. It is imperative that the obvious crisis of humanity be seen in connection with the devaluation of faith typical for postmodern times. In spite of protestations to the contrary, human beings have in fact been degraded to being machines and commodities. Their value is measured by their degree of productivity, and very often even that does not guar-

antee a life in dignity. While the population increases, jobs decrease, social benefits are privatized and more and more people are socially marginalized.

For these reasons, there is a growing culture of violence in my home country. A human life is not worth much. The population is arming itself, and the possession of weapons seems to be the only guarantee for a little bit of security. As a consequence in Rio de Janeiro, for instance, more people have been victims of so-called stray bullets than of organized crime. The emotional coldness with which people rage and kill is truly shattering. In Brasilia a few youths recently poured alcohol over an Indian sleeping on the ground and then set him alight — from pure playfulness, as they said for the record. Violence, especially against women and children, has become the norm. Unfortunately, the situation is similar in other parts of the world.

Usually, the question of why there is this flood of violence is not even raised, and the answer is most often limited to calling for a stronger police force. Is there violence from above caused by structures perpetuating a life unfit for human beings? A society geared to performance, which puts profit above the common good and reduces the insistence on social justice to maudlin sentimentality, must not be surprised when it produces monsters and criminals. Competitiveness is the magic word that is to get us out of all bottlenecks. Why is this so uncritically accepted without testing whether in the long run society can survive it? Competition is deemed necessary even if it leads to ruin.



Limits have to be set. Inhumanity will not be exorcized by increased production alone.

In this connection, the question must be raised whether this spirit is not ultimately a consequence of a naturalistic anthropology that seems increasingly to be gaining ground. It reduces human beings to their biological functions and the interests that can be derived from them. We have lost sight of the fact that human existence has to do with dignity. Human beings have become robots that can be used, repaired or consigned to the scrap yard at will. Concepts such as genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, but also the labor market and media politics, illustrate the problem. In practically all these areas there is a noticeable absence of ethics. Ethics is frequently only a question of feasibility. Is it surprising that people react with increasing violence to the violation of their dignity?

God's humanism, as unmistakably revealed in Jesus Christ's love, keeps our hearts in captivity (2 Corinthians 5:14). We cannot but empathize with the maltreated creature and at the same time protest against the dehumanization, taking place mainly in metropolitan areas, prisons, refugee camps, and against the brutalization of social relations. God is love, according to the Christian creed. The Bible speaks from the very beginning of this love. It holds judgement over the lovelessness among people and is a call to active redress.

The Lutheran World Federation has attempted such redress and not only through its Department for World Service. Many of its programs aim at protecting the God-

given right to life and the recovery of human dignity. It cannot fulfill this task alone but needs many allies, not only among the churches, but also in other religions, in society and politics. This world needs a radical return to humanity. Is the price too high, the aim unreachable? Justice, which guarantees everyone a place in society, is a prerequisite for peace just as peace is a prerequisite for a state in which the law rules.

3. The Lutheran World Federation is concerned with the future, i.e., the integrity of God's creation and the preservation of our common home. In view of the serious threats confronting humankind, a paralyzing panic is spreading. Energetic measures are required. We speak of globalization which implies that, due to technological progress, humankind has come closer. Wars can hardly be locally contained. The same is true with regard to the destruction of the environment. Economics and communication ignore geographical boundaries. Whereas what happens in one part of the world has implications for others, there are few signs that global measures are being taken to ensure the safety of this planet.

As a global organization, the Lutheran World Federation has developed a special sensitivity to this shortcoming. The deep rifts running through humanity are reflected in its member churches and its fields of work. The insufficiency of global accords and initiatives is deplorable. It is still local politics and domestic interests that set the tone. There is only little interest, if any, in international affairs, and it has not been possible to establish the proper balance between local and global concerns.



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Particularity, however, has a claim of its own. Globalization must not mean that cultural and contextual peculiarities are evened out. This trend is clearly visible. Here we should learn from the often painful experiences of recent history. Let us take development politics as an example. The naive export of Western technologies frequently failed to take into account specific environmental conditions and ignored the wealth of experience of the target groups that over centuries guaranteed their survival. It is hardly surprising that many development strategies failed. Development politics remains necessary, but requires reflection on partnership. Peoples and cultures have a right to their own identities and respect for their wisdom. This is true for the churches as well. Even though each cultural heritage needs critical review, enforced uniformity must be rejected.

Nevertheless, there is a need for worldwide structures which address the common tasks and look for solutions. Whatever exists in this connection so far is insufficient. "Politics" has to be complemented by "ecumenics," in the secular realm as well. Again the question arises, although at a different level, of the individual's relationship to the whole and vice versa. Politics must not give up its leadership to alleged inherent economic necessities or other forces. It is expected to provide "ecumenical" governance.

Of course, all this is not simply a question of structures. Here, too, what is at stake is a spirit that moves human beings. With regard to the future, there seems to be just one unshakeable certainty, namely death, the end of all things. The Christian faith dares to contradict. Here, too, it is committed to Jesus of Nazareth and his proclamation

of the kingdom of God as encompassing all history and existence.

Indeed, faith in death is deadly. Relinquishing the transcendent dimension of reality and thus humanity not only undermines responsibility but leads to a concentration on the here and now which forces all blessedness into the short span of a human life. A ruthless chasing after happiness sets in that is incapable of renunciation, hostile to communion and yet unable to protect against frustration. A claim is made on this life that it cannot fulfil. As there is a dangerous transcendentalism, i.e., escaping from the world into an imaginary thereafter, there is also an immanentism, an escape from the thereafter into an earthly and yet imaginary world. Both have destructive consequences.

Expecting God's kingdom requires sober and sensible action. This includes the understanding that our planet's resources are finite. It requires careful stewardship of nature, limitation of population growth and just distribution of available commodities. Faith and ethics belong together. There is no ethics that is not based on doctrine. We need a wisdom that takes the creatureliness of human beings seriously and a hope that is oriented to the coming of God's kingdom. Without taking "heaven" into account, the earth does not have a chance.

#### *What we want*

The Assembly theme already indicates the most important aspect of the expectations for this gathering: We want to fulfill our call and give testimony. We do this "in Christ," that is, in the reality created by him. What does this reality look like? Well, as the apostle Paul describes it, as a certainty that nothing, not even death, can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" (Ro-



mans 8:38). We owe this message to the whole world just as Paul confessed (Romans 1:14). Knowing the history of Jesus of Nazareth is a basic human right. Hence, our meeting here is a witnessing gathering, a testimony, an attempt at communicating that which concerns us directly. Let me name three aspects of particular importance to me:

1. Witnesses develop through hearing and seeing. They must have good eyes and ears, be vigilant, and not roam the earth as if in a dream. Faith also begins with hearing and seeing, feeling and experiencing: "... what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... we declare to you" (1 John 1:1ff.). Not only "what was from the beginning," but what is at the moment must be heard and seen. Witnesses are expected to recognize the signs of the times to identify what is important and continue to learn since otherwise they run the risk of not being understood.

Thus, the Assembly's success will depend significantly on our ability to see and hear. Meeting as people of different backgrounds and particularities our witness will be manifold, especially since it will, at least to a certain extent, have autobiographical features. Witness is "life witness". That is true also for other cultures and religions. This must be respected and requires increased readiness to hear.

Yet with all plurality of witness, there must be a common point of reference, otherwise it is only aimless chatter. This point of reference is the "word of life" mentioned by the apostle John. What is at stake is the life of the world, no less. For

this reason, Simon Peter's confession in the Gospel according to John is one of the most impressive texts. Jesus leaves it up to his disciples to turn back as many others did. He asks them, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God'" (John 6:67ff.).

2. We also want to address this faith, directly or indirectly. Testimony is the result of hearing that without speaking remains mute. Acting is part of speaking, setting an example, a sign. Word and deed belong together, in biblical and in Lutheran terms. We need the active word and the verbal deed.

The word of the church is not always welcome. Since the time of the prophets, it has faced suspicion and its competence has been denied. Words of life are often inconvenient. Admittedly, the church must not claim universal competence in all areas. It needs the knowledge of experts if it wants to remain a critical partner. In any case, when Christians speak up they should not behave as know-alls. This is important, not least in the dialogues with people of other religions. Witness does not force something upon others but strives for mutual understanding without being non-committal. For the word of life is the norm for everything that is human.

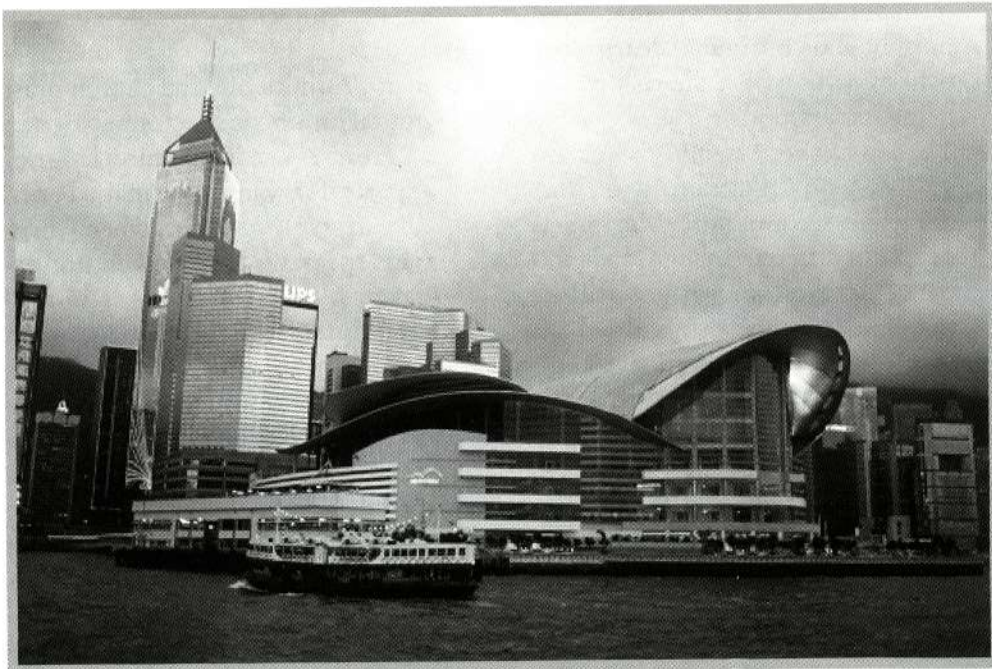
3. Finally, apart from hearing, speaking, deliberating, working, we also want to celebrate together. Celebrating is part of the faith, is an expression of joy and thankfulness to God. Thanklessness is the beginning of heresy. It is a symptom of



works righteousness, i.e., an attitude that values one's own achievements higher than God's mercy. The Lutheran World Federation invites to celebrations and to sharing its joy "in Christ".

Joy is a basic human need and a quality of God's kingdom (Romans 14:17). Would it be wrong to say that our world is suffering from a great lack of joy? While the offer of pleasure, experiences, excitement is enormous, real joy is rare. It is part of our task as Christians to awaken joy and to make people joyful. But

this will succeed only if we ourselves are capable of joy. The gospel is a source of joy that can be expressed in many forms, especially in worship, in praise and thanksgiving. Ultimately, this Assembly should be about the glory of God, for when God is honored, human beings will come into their own right. This will be a test for whether the Assembly was worthwhile or not. For this we pray for the presence of the Spirit.



## ADDRESS BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY

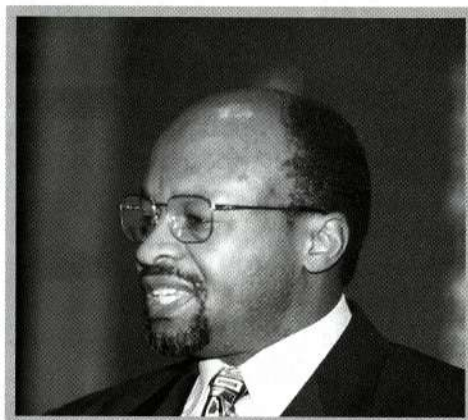
### *FROM CURITIBA TO HONG KONG*

*Ishmael Noko*

#### *Introduction*

The physical presence of so many delegates, guests, visitors and staff in this place at this time confirms indeed that the Lutheran World Federation's Ninth Assembly has begun. On behalf of the Secretariat it is my pleasure and honor to welcome you all. In particular, I acknowledge the presence of two of my predecessors, Dr André Appel and Dr Gunnar Stålsett. Dr Appel served as General Secretary from 1965 to 1974 and Dr Stålsett from 1985 to 1994. We are also honored by the presence of Mrs Unn Stålsett. Two former Presidents of the Federation, Archbishop Mikko Juva who served from 1970-1977, and Bishop Johannes Hanselmann who served from 1987-1990, were unable to accept invitations on medical grounds, but send their best wishes for the Assembly.

When the first Assembly was held in Lund, Sweden, in 1947, delegates came together from 26 countries. Today, 50 years later, delegates come from more than 70 countries representing well over 80 distinct cultures and languages. As I look across this Assembly and listen to the silent, but distinct body-language that emerges from this multicultural and multinational gathering I cannot help draw the only possible conclusion; namely that every Assem-



*The Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko  
General Secretary of the Lutheran  
World Federation and pastor of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
Zimbabwe*

bly is indeed a wonderful opportunity to rededicate ourselves to God's mission and to experience the presence of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church. Gratitude is due to the Lutheran churches in Hong Kong whose gracious invitation brings us here today and who have taken on the considerable responsibility of hosting the Ninth Assembly. I salute also the ecumenical councils in the region, the Hong Kong Christian Council, the Christian Conference of Asia and the China Christian Council, for their support for the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. I recognize also the representatives of the Christian World Communions, World Council of Churches (WCC) and other ecumenical organizations. I will in due course introduce them to the Assembly

I want to register right from the outset that my address will not function as an activity report; such a report is already available to the Assembly participants as a separate document, entitled "From Curitiba to Hong Kong — 1990-1997." Therefore, I will restrict myself to selected topics and themes.



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### *Invitation to China honored at last*

One of the signatories to the LWF Constitution was the Reverend Dr P'eng Fu, then President of the Lutheran Church of China (LCC). A footnote in the history of initiatives to establish Lutheranism in China informs us that in 1946, a year before the LWF Assembly in Lund, the LCC had decided in principle to invite the LWF to hold its second Assembly in China. It is reasonable to assume that Dr P'eng's participation in Lund gave him a sense of the wider Lutheran community around the world. Upon his return to China, he and his co-workers planned to secure the endorsement for such an invitation from the Synod of the LCC scheduled then for 10 October 1949. The Synod was never held because of the Communist revolution and political upheavals that intervened and consequently, the invitation to the LWF was never dispatched.

Dr P'eng, who subsequently served as President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong and of the LCC Hong Kong Association, never gave up the hope that one day the Chinese Lutheran churches would host the LWF Assembly. Some of the senior elders within the Chinese Lutheran community remember that in about 1960 or so, when the LWF was considering plans for the Fourth Assembly, Dr P'eng sent a letter of invitation to the LWF. The carefully maintained records in relation to the planning for the Fourth Assembly seem to suggest that the invitation was never tabled for consideration by the Executive Committee when the invitations from Norway and Finland were discussed. Without wishing to read too much into what might have happened to Dr P'eng's invitation, it is most probable that at the time some persons in the LWF leadership must have thought that it was inconceivable

that such a "small" and "young" church could imagine hosting the LWF Assembly. Yes, indeed, the Lutheran Church of China was also geographically and culturally far from the heartland of Lutheran orthodoxy. The Fourth Assembly was, of course, ultimately held in Helsinki, Finland. Dr P'eng's prayer and wish to host an LWF assembly in this region and country remained pending for fifty long years. The Lutheran churches in Hong Kong's invitation for the LWF to hold its Ninth Assembly here can be seen as a renewal and fulfilment of Dr P'eng's invitation. Our presence here in Hong Kong, China, is a tribute to the vision and aspirations of Dr P'eng Fu and his colleagues, now gathered in peace with those who have gone before us to be part of the cloud of witnesses with whom we are called in Christ to bear witness to the good news.

We are indeed privileged to meet here in Hong Kong/China at this time of political and social change. The former British colony of Hong Kong was returned on July 1 to its ancient sovereign China after over 150 years of colonial administration. Transitions of such a dramatic nature, wherever they occur, are always accompanied by a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty. There is concern in and outside Hong Kong about the extent to which civil liberties and personal freedoms will be respected by the new political administration. During the month of April this year, I had a meeting with the Chief Executive, Mr Tung Chee Hwa. Included in the agenda of our meeting was this concern. From him I received the assurance that civil liberties and personal freedoms will be respected. I was also informed in the presence of some of the Lutheran church leaders in Hong Kong that churches will continue to enjoy the same religious freedoms as



before. Without claiming full knowledge of the situation as it is now or as it will unfold, I believe that the political authorities have a golden opportunity at this point in time to implement what was promised in the Sino-British agreement, signed on 19 December 1984 and ratified in May 1985, and in the Basic Law promulgated by the People's Republic of China to govern Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China. The successful realization of the one country, two systems vision, the well-being of Hong Kong's people and the continued vigor of its economy depend upon the full implementation of these promises. If the promises contained in the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law are adhered to, confidence and trust will be maintained and stability and prosperity in Hong Kong will be an asset to the national well-being of the People's Republic of China.

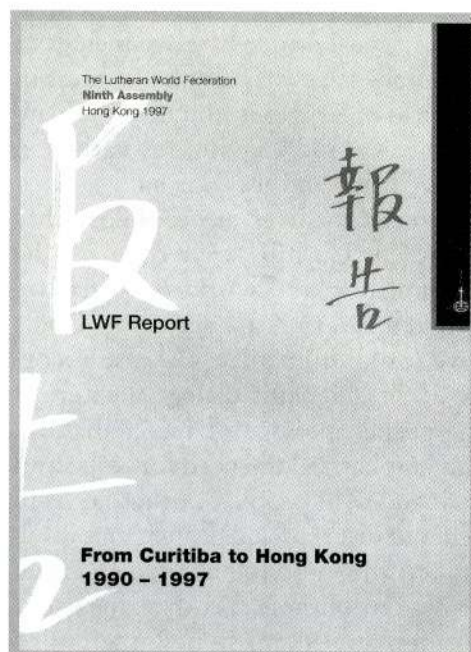
### Curitiba

As we gather here in Hong Kong one cannot help but hear the concluding echoes of our last Assembly in Curitiba. In a special way the Eighth Assembly gives shape to this Assembly and therefore creates a special context for our deliberations. Guided by the theme "I Have Heard the Cry of My People" we sought to discern God's guidance through the study of Scripture, in worship, in eucharistic celebration, in listening to the lectures and in sharing experiences with one another. Through this process we felt sufficiently moved and informed to the extent that we made a declaration through a common pastoral Message, addressed to the Lutheran communion worldwide. In the Message delegates and churches committed themselves to joint action in God's mission: to life in communion, to work for the protection and liberation of cre-

ation; for peace with justice in churches, nations and at the international level; and for witnessing in a multicultural/multireligious and secularized world.

We departed from Curitiba with a strong consensus and a shared conviction that although God hears the cry of all of creation, God may respond in ways which we do not fully understand or in ways for which we are not prepared. The delegates concluded the Assembly on a high note of confidence that God is our redeemer and our destiny.

This Assembly needs to be informed as to how the Federation sought to implement some of the commitments made in Curitiba. In this connection I refer you to the document "From Curitiba to Hong Kong — 1990-1997." This is the General Secretary's report to the Assembly on how the Council and the Secretariat sought to translate the Assembly Message into programs and activities to fulfil the mandate of the Federation during the period under review. You will discover that in some





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instances the commitments were fully implemented, whilst in others implementation, or full implementation, was not possible due to very difficult and pressing circumstances affecting the member churches, sometimes relating to the very survival of those churches. In other situations such as in Sierra Leone and Liberia the bishop and members of the Church Council spent most of their time in exile or on the run due to the political turmoil. In yet other instances, internal conflicts consumed the spiritual and material resources of some member churches, to the extent that it became impossible to prioritize the implementation of these commitments. Nevertheless, we are once again gathered together in hope and faith as a communion, to seek grace and strength, and to renew our commitment to our common calling.

#### *The multifaith context*

The Asian multifaith setting for this Assembly prompts us to renew and affirm our commitment to interfaith dialogue as a legitimate form of ministry and witness in a religiously plural world. The Curitiba Message includes a comprehensive chapter on "Witness in a World of Religious Pluralism" affirming both "God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ" and also "the hidden work of God in the lives of people of other faiths." At Curitiba, we recognized the religiously plural world in which we live as a call to bear witness to God's love for all humanity. We also recognized the inherently dialogical nature of the gospel message of reconciliation, and emphasized the need for respectful dialogue with people of other faiths in order to dispel prejudice, religious intolerance and the violence which often grows out of these. Yet dialogue is not an alternative to mission. Rather, it is a

context within which we bear witness to people of other faiths in an atmosphere of trust, mutual understanding and respect. It is also the foundation upon which we can build to find ways of working together for human welfare in spite of religious differences. With this in mind, we must redouble our efforts to do the things we committed ourselves to at Curitiba.

It is tragic that religious diversity has been a divisive rather than a unifying factor in our communities. People of different faiths, in Asia as elsewhere in the world, must make every effort to find a common language, a common ground to address common concerns in their societies. An objective, correct and deeper understanding of each other's faiths will provide us with a firmer foundation for our witness to people of other faiths, and could spare our communities the unnecessary dislocation which results from ignorance and prejudice. The role of our theological institutions in removing this ignorance and prejudice cannot be overemphasized. There is a great need to incorporate multifaith perspectives into a wide range of programs in our Bible schools, theological seminaries and faculties.

A renewed commitment to and implementation of interfaith dialogue will, I believe, lead us to a deeper understanding of the divine mysteries through shared engagement with our fellow human beings.

#### *Fifty years of growing together*

The years between 1947 and 1997 have been marked by inter-Lutheran discussions on the purpose and nature of the Lutheran World Federation. Right from the day of the Federation's founding, the question about the ecclesial character of the Federation was raised time and again. It is instructive to recall



the very insightful greeting sent by the General Secretary of the incipient World Council of Churches, Dr W.A. Visser't Hooft, to the delegates at the first Assembly of the LWF in Lund in 1947. This is an excerpt from what he said:

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I have the pleasure to send fraternal greetings to the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of its important meeting in Lund. The World Council of Churches is deeply aware of the fact that the ecumenical task can only be performed if the main confessional federations and alliances perform their task of bringing the churches of their confessional family together in close fellowship and so prepare the way for the even greater and more difficult task of establishing the wider ecumenical Christian fellowship. We express, therefore, the wish that the Lund Conference may lead both to a fastening of the ties among the Lutheran churches in the world and to a strengthening of the bonds between the Lutheran churches and those of the communities which find their expression in the World Council of Churches (*Proceedings of the LWF, Lund, Sweden, June 30 - July 1, 1947*).

As indicated above, the purpose of the LWF was to bring together Lutheran churches from around the world and to strengthen the bonds between them for the sake of the wider Christian fellowship. Moreover, in addition to the purpose of the LWF the question about the nature of the Federation was raised again and again: "Is the LWF a church?"

and if not, "Is there a Lutheran world church?" These questions were raised and responded to amidst the fear and suspicion that there was a tendency in some quarters of the LWF to want to position the organization as a superchurch. On more than one occasion the Constitution was amended (1963) disclaiming the possible intention of being or becoming a church in a constitutional sense. The LWF was clearly defined then as an agency and instrument of synodically independent churches that have opted to be in a free association with one another. This agency was to exercise no churchly functions on its own authority, nor to have the power to legislate on behalf of the member churches. Accordingly, the LWF was defined primarily by what it did or did not do, and not by what it was in itself. Yet despite the fear and concern about the LWF becoming a Lutheran world church, the member churches continued to grow together, deepening their fellowship through acting jointly on common problems, sharing hopes, joys and lamentations. Their shared faith was tested in the crucibles of human crises. Progress in communication and mass media helped link the churches. From year to year local parish pastors discovered that fewer and fewer local pastoral questions could be decided in isolation without taking into account what was happening in other parts of the world. Reflecting on the invisible workings of God in similar circumstances, former LWF President Archbishop Mikko E. Juva, once said that,

As often in the course of history, God is speaking to us through the events in the world and driving us out from self-sufficiency and isolation into fellowship and cooperation.



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Mikko Juva summarizes as aptly as one can the experience of the Lutheran World Federation's member churches over the last fifty years. Through God's grace we have discovered that, in spite of our desire to retain our autonomy through our own local church constitution, complete isolation in churchly matters is not possible for churches who are in fellowship with each other. There are certain decisive issues and realities that can be dealt with better jointly, through regional or international structures of flexible mutuality. In order to nurture global Lutheranism, the LWF Constitution requires that Assemblies be held every six or seven years. These Assemblies are of course big and expensive, but they have been a source of inspiration, encouragement, and opportunities for churches to uplift and nurture each other in a pilgrimage towards deeper fellowship.

The work undertaken jointly has involved member churches in programs of emergency relief, rehabilitation and assistance for refugees and displaced communities. The Federation has been engaged in this critical area since the end of the Second World War. Some of you in this hall will remember very well what it was like then because you yourselves have been refugees or displaced persons. In this very place in which we are today, the LWF member churches have had programs assisting people fleeing from Indochina. The churches have worked together in community development programs in several nations; in peace initiatives in Central America in response to the situations in El Salvador and Guatemala. The stories of Southern Africa and the Great Lakes region in Africa are among those that rallied the LWF member churches together for joint action, such as programs for Churches Drought Action in Africa

(CDAA) in 1983/84 and in Action by Churches Together (ACT) since 1995 responding to human needs in nations such as the former Yugoslavia and India. Another example of such joint action is the health program for the Palestinian community that was initiated in 1956 on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem. Through this ministry the Lutheran communion has supported the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan in its witness and service in a context marked by a seemingly never ending conflict.

In the area of theology and ecumenical research, the Federation has provided a solid theological foundation for its inter-Lutheran and ecumenical work. It has been assisted in this task by the LWF-related Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. Theology continues to be at the core of our identity as a Lutheran communion and an integral part of ecumenical engagement. In the search for inter-Lutheran unity we have focused on new ways of enriching and renewing our Lutheran tradition in worship and liturgy. The Lutheran tradition itself has to a large extent developed within the context of worship and with the aim of renewing this central element of the Church catholic. It must be borne in mind that Luther reformed but did not reject the main liturgical stream of the historical tradition into which he was born and saw himself placed as a believer, pastor and teacher. Worshiping together when occasion permits is a sign of unity and an opportunity for mutual sharing of our spiritual treasures in God.

The Federation has supported the member churches in broad missiological discussions. This has been through the publication of relevant material for study, programs, projects and other activities that have undergirded the life



and work of the member churches. Multilateral sharing and decision-making throughout the Federation regarding programs of central importance in the life of the churches have contributed to a sense of working together. The co-ordination of regional meetings of heads of churches, Christian and theological educators has helped develop a sense of koinonia. The initiative to provide the churches with a comprehensive clear Plan of Action for the empowerment of women in church and society has gone a long way in connecting and stimulating a sense of togetherness within and among the member churches.

As the LWF deepened its self-understanding new structures were adopted to enable the Federation to give shape to its responsibilities. The debate on structural renewal were so heated that they sometimes became acrimonious. I am convinced that while the discussions were difficult and, occasionally, unpleasant, they have in a unique way strengthened our bonds through the process of, to quote Mikko Juva again, "driving us out from self-sufficiency and isolation into fellowship and co-operation."

The story of our life and growing together is told in the recently published volume entitled *From Federation to Communion: History of the Lutheran World Federation*. It is a thematic consideration of the dominant concerns in our life, service, mission, theology, ecclesiology, ecumenism, inclusiveness and public witness in respect to international affairs and human rights. We are more than grateful to the authors, Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari and Norman Hjelm. We are also grateful to all those who contributed their insights and experience. The contents of the book gives us precisely that lively sense of history and memory which

everyone of us needs as we move towards the horizon God is setting before us.

*Communion among  
Lutheran member churches:  
what does it imply?*

Communion among Lutheran member churches implies among other things taking courageous steps forward. First, it means a change of perspective concerning the relationship between the LWF and its member churches. There are no longer the member churches on the one hand and the LWF with its Geneva office and working instruments on the other. The churches are the LWF and through the governing bodies, the Council and Assembly, they live out their koinonia. The LWF in its organizational form is the instrument and sign of this communion. You, the member churches, are the Lutheran Communion; a partial expression of the wider koinonia; i.e., the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The decisions and commitments you make are not the decisions and commitments of an organization but of a communion of churches.

In organizational terms, such a communion needs structures and instruments in order to shape and express its faith, life and mission. Thus the Federation's administrative and operational services are instruments of our communion and its ecclesial and organizational aspects inseparably interwoven — both belong together. This inseparability and interwovenness of the LWF and the Lutheran Communion indicate in my opinion that the title Lutheran World Federation no longer adequately expresses who we are. The Lutheran Communion can no longer be defined in "federal" structures, for it is much more than that. I sincerely believe that



we have today, if we have not already done so, arrived at the crossroads at which we should take a bold step and reconsider the title *Lutheran World Federation* and replace it with an appropriate one. In order to move forward with this matter I would suggest that this Assembly instruct the next Council to study the issue in consultation with the member churches and to make concrete suggestions at the next Assembly.

The second implication for Lutheran relations within the LWF is the new awareness that while we belong to the local Lutheran church we also belong to the worldwide Lutheran Communion. This means that actions and plans taken locally in our churches are placed within the context of a global fellowship. Thus we receive space and freedom to deal with our local or national problems or concerns by involving in some manner the wider communion. We have a wealth of resources for spiritual renewal by learning from the experience of sister churches as well as the unique opportunity to draw on the consultative services of sister churches as we move forward in our ecumenical relations in our countries or regions. While previously we considered our members, pastors and bishops only as members, pastors and bishops of our local churches, now we have in the true biblical and theological sense a basis for regarding these persons as members, pastors and bishops in the *Lutheran Communion*. In Christ we are called to make much more visible what we are already — a communion of churches in faith, sacraments, confession, life and mission. "In Christ — called to witness" means among other things that we can no longer choose to witness in, as it were, the splendor of our provincial isolation.

Third, our communion is a committed communion. Mutual commitment within a communion of churches should be lived much more actively through regular visiting and praying with and for one another. Through these apostolic journeys and relationships, member churches will develop a deeper understanding and commitment for one another. Being committed should also involve the readiness to develop common perspectives on theological and ethical issues in a world yearning for reconciliation and hope. We ought to work towards taking common decisions on issues of mutual concern as an expression of our mission in this world. Yet most of the time Lutheran churches are sensitive and defensive to anything that "smells" like curtailment of their autonomy. We are so used to a "territorial" and "national" understanding of the church that we feel threatened by any other proposal. We must remember that Jesus is Lord of the Church. He alone through the Holy Spirit will change and move it in directions that we cannot fully understand. Hence we must be willing to question critically the ecclesiastical and constitutional protectiveness in our churches that may eventually hinder the Holy Spirit from doing new things, such as orientating church synods, Assemblies, and councils towards our communion in such a way that we truly live God's gift — *koinonia*.

***The Lutheran Communion and the ecumenical engagement:  
What is the issue at stake?***

The issue at stake is: Do we really need the Lutheran World Federation or any confessional body in addition to the already existing ecumenical organizations such as the WCC? Are we in some way slowing down the journey towards vis-



ible unity by giving confessional communions so much emphasis and attention? These are some of the questions that had to be answered by the founding parents of the LWF. The question that confronts us today is, "what is the special role of the LWF with regard to the fulfillment of the noble goal of the ecumenical movement, namely the realization of visible unity of the church?" This question comes to us very sharply for two reasons: (a) the question of dwindling financial resources is extremely pertinent and (b) due to growing nationalistic, tribal and ethnocentric tendencies in church and society.

Permit me to quote again from Dr Visser't Hooft's greetings to the delegates at the first Assembly in Lund a passage which is very appropriate to this issue. He said,

The World Council of Churches is deeply aware of the fact that the ecumenical task can only be performed if the main confessional federations and alliances perform their task of bringing the churches of their confessional family together in close fellowship and so prepare the way for the even greater and more difficult task of establishing the wider ecumenical Christian fellowship.

In the first fifty years of its existence and work, the LWF has developed a remarkable ecumenical profile. It has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that there is no contradiction between confessional loyalty and ecumenical commitment. During this period the LWF has helped develop the reality of the communion of Lutheran churches with one another and in their ecumenical involvement.

The extent of the LWF's ecumenical commitment to date is apparent in

the fact that the member churches are also among the most active members — theologically, practically and financially — of the WCC, and strongly represented in regional, national and local ecumenical bodies. Furthermore, the LWF has initiated and worked with other Christian communions on a conception of the goal of Christian unity in terms of "unity in reconciled diversity." This concept was described in the statement of the 1984 LWF Assembly on "The Unity We Seek" and is still valid as the basic expression of the LWF's ecumenical vision. The statement says that Christian unity is "expressed as *koinonia*" in the common confession of the apostolic faith, as *koinonia* in baptism and Eucharist and mutually recognized ministries, as *koinonia* in worship, as *koinonia* in striving for peace, justice and freedom and as a foretaste of the *koinonia* the Lord will at the end of time bring about in his kingdom. I believe this to be a challenging description of the communion we seek with others.

The seriousness of the LWF's ecumenical commitment finds visible expression in the bilateral theological dialogues with other Christian world communions which have taken place since 1970. Remarkable agreements and convergences on issues which have hitherto divided our churches have been reached in the dialogues with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed/Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches. In recent years we undertook a new step by engaging in an ecumenically pioneering consultation with the Seventh-day Adventists.

We rejoice in the positive ecumenical steps that have resulted in agreements such as the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), and the Porvoo Common Statement of 1992 which was signed last year. These agreements represent some



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of the most significant ecumenical steps forward in recent years.

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification presented another significant ecumenical opportunity. Drafted by the representatives of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation this proposed declaration is now before the respective partner churches for consideration. On the basis of the dialogue between the LWF and the Pontifical Council the proposed Joint Declaration draws the conclusion that "a consensus on the basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics" (para. 40). In this connection, it is important to make the distinction between agreement on the basic truths of the doctrine of justification and their further theological interpretation. Some critics of the Joint Declaration do not make this important distinction.

The acceptance of the Joint Declaration would be of extraordinary historical, ecumenical, pastoral, and missiological significance. Among other things it would signify that we have overcome the deepest and most profound conflict between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions, which has existed since the time of the Reformation. It would establish that the sixteenth-century condemnations in as far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, "do not apply to the teaching of both churches" as presented in this Declaration (para. 41). The acceptance of the Joint Declaration would provide new parameters for continuing dialogue on those issues where serious differences remain. It would facilitate individual Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches and congregations developing creative relationships in mutual trust, spiritual sharing and pastoral and social col-

laboration. At the heart of Lutheran ecclesiology is the recognition that wherever the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered accordingly to the gospel, the church exists. Therefore Lutherans should at all times approach the question of their relationship to others in the spirit of *catholicity, without hostility and prejudice*.

It is refreshing and necessary to bear in mind that although drafted by Martin Luther's party, the Confessio Augustana (CA) of 1530 was addressed to the entire church. Therefore, ecumenism is not one of the many activities on the list of options from which the LWF may choose but ecumenical engagement is an integral part of what it means to be Lutheran.

### *Advocacy in a divided world*

#### *A community of women and men*

At Curitiba, we committed ourselves as individuals, and the churches we represented, to work for equality for the sake of Christ. It is heartbreaking to remind this Assembly that we are concluding the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, and yet women and girls remain a disadvantaged group in the majority of our nations and churches. While the important role that women play in society is widely recognized, conceptual awareness of gender equity has not necessarily been translated into different behavior patterns. Women confront violence more frequently in their lives than men, be it as a result of war, domestic violence, cultural violence, sexual harassment, abuse or exploitation. They constitute 89 percent of the world's refugees and migrants escaping from wars, injustice and economic hardship. Over the years the Federation in cooperation with the member churches has addressed the is-



sue in several ways and has focused on five specific areas:

*Affirmative Action for Women.* As a result of the quota system agreed upon at the Budapest Assembly in 1984 this Assembly can celebrate a 49 percent presence of women delegates. However difficult it may be, we must continue to maintain affirmative action for women until such time as it becomes natural for the churches to appoint women delegates to events in churches, in the LWF and indeed in every area of church life.

*Capacity Building.* Women have been disadvantaged regarding opportunities for self-development. In addition, entering a male-dominated arena requires a lot of courage and hard work on the part of women. There is a need to strengthen and financially support women's education, including theological formation. Women's desks and organizations in the churches need to be supported in the important work they do to promote self-confidence in women and in raising the consciousness of the whole church on concerns which drastically affect the lives of women and, by extension, the whole of society.

*Mainstreaming.* Mainstreaming of women entails using a gender lens to scrutinize the entire work of the church in mission, diakonia and proclamation. There are gender issues in development projects and programs, personnel and employment policies, leadership and participation, the interpretation and teaching of the Bible and even the use of language in worship.

*Representation.* We have made a lot of progress in the area of women's representation at many LWF events. This Assembly falls short by 1 percent of the Budapest resolution which recommended 50 percent women representation. We have cause to celebrate. Yet, at the same time, we are painfully aware

that many women who come to LWF events do not have leadership positions in their home churches. That causes a dilemma both for you as churches and for the LWF staff who are trying to implement the decision which you took. Equal representation of men and women can never be negative. This Assembly may need to consider and come to some agreement on ways to improve the presence of women in church leadership at the local level.

*Women and the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.* Within these short fifty years, one of the major changes in Lutheran churches has been the acceptance of the ordination of women. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands was the first church to accept women's ordination in 1922, twenty five years before the LWF was founded and we therefore celebrate this year 75 years of women's ordination. Today, nearly 70 percent of Lutheran churches ordain women. Some have recently taken this decision and are in the process of preparing congregations and women candidates. In his address to the Eighth LWF Assembly in Curitiba my predecessor, Gunnar Stålsett, expressed the hope that by the Ninth Assembly there would be women bishops. Indeed, we have eight women bishops now — 1 in Germany, 2 in the USA, 1 in Norway, 2 in Denmark and Greenland, 1 in India and 1 Bishop-elect in Sweden. Of course, some of our churches do not use the terminology of bishop. There are three women presidents in Nicaragua, Peru and Hong Kong. The period since Curitiba has brought this joy while, at the same time, there have been some regrets. 30 percent of LWF member churches still do not ordain women. Some of them are actively discussing the inclusive ministry with a view to achiev-



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ing this goal in the foreseeable future. Others were established in the last twenty years and have thus not had the possibility to discuss this issue fully. There is yet another category of church, namely those that heavily depend on their partners' financial resources and who have, unfortunately, been told that the day they ordain women, overseas personnel and financial resources will be denied. This is indeed unfortunate. I would ask member churches to pay attention to this and address these economic threats.

Over the last thirty years the LWF has had an impeccable record of passing resolutions that sought to move the churches towards equality between women and men. Some changes have indeed occurred as result of that, but the main problem is the willingness to implement those resolutions not merely for the good of women but for the sake of a healthy community of women and men. Therefore, there is a need for mechanisms to be set up in our churches to follow up and implement these resolutions.

#### **Human dignity and human rights**

The Lutheran World Federation, at fifty years of age, is only just older than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. The fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration will be celebrated on 10 December next year. It was adopted in a mood of humanistic optimism that a new world order was emerging from the ashes of the two world wars; a new world order in which the concept of the fundamental dignity and human rights of all people would provide the foundation for a just and peaceful future. The founders of the LWF in Lund must have shared the same concern for human rights, justice

and peace, and yet their concern was one deeply rooted in the faith. They operated from the biblical understanding that every human being is created in the image of God — *imago Dei*. From the Judeo-Christian tradition, human dignity and human rights have divine value. Every living person has a special value in the eyes of God. When humankind sinned against God and became enslaved to the powers and principalities, God assumed the human condition in Jesus-Emmanuel — “God with us.” Through the precious blood of God’s son, we were made the precious children of God. Our human freedom paid for at a high cost by God.

The cross of Calvary is a symbol not only of the suffering of God in Christ but also God’s public declaration that human life is life in freedom — a gift from God. If Christ’s death is an affirmation of our divine value, then who on earth has the right to deny you and me that freedom? The church as the body of Christ is called to be a living witness and to bear the good news to the whole inhabited world. It cannot shrink from that responsibility without undermining the credibility of its witness. Thus, when the church speaks on human rights and human dignity its point of departure and orientation is not humanistic optimism but what God has already accomplished in Christ for humanity.

In today’s divided world there are crises and unprecedented violations of human rights on every continent if not in every nation. When the church tries to speak with a critically prophetic voice, there are those who rebuke the church for what they describe as the church’s involvement in political activity. Sometimes a different question is asked, “What is the church doing for these poor people whose dignity and



rights are being violated?" The underlying assumption in both cases is that the church can somehow stand apart from the context in which the suffering and crisis is being experienced. The church, as the people of God, cannot be a reality apart from the human condition. In actual fact, where wars are being fought, the church is trampled over. Where the refugees and displaced persons are fleeing, the church becomes an asylum seeker. Where people are being tortured and arbitrarily imprisoned, the church is crucified. Where impunity and injustice poison reconciliation, the church is divided. Where poverty and economic dispossession afflicts the people, the church is impoverished. Where women and children are crying for freedom from exploitation, it is the church that is crying. The church as the body of Christ and the people of God lives and shares in the suffering of the people and in doing so bears testimony to God's love and compassion in Christ.

Inasmuch as the good news that we receive in Christ is the news of peace and reconciliation with God, we seek to reflect that message of peace and reconciliation in all our activities. One important aspect of this is the mission of promoting peace and reconciliation within our communities and nations. In the absence of peace and reconciliation, our children are consigned to yet another generation of conflict, exploitation and misery. Whilst perpetrators of atrocities and gross injustices continue to enjoy impunity, there can be no healing. The church has an insistent calling to promote peace and reconciliation wherever conflict, hatred, injustice and brokenness exist in our communities.

*As we look to the future —  
some concluding thoughts*

This century will be remembered by the church as the century of ecumenism. The main agenda of the ecumenical movement in the first part of the twenty-first century will, in my view, be dedicated to harvesting the results of the ecumenical dialogues. Allow me to make two observations in this regard:

- a) Formal ecumenical dialogues have progressed much further in some churches in the Northern hemisphere than in the Southern hemisphere. A new situation is developing whereby the old North-South divide will create new ecclesiastical divisions. We ought to be alert that this does not occur.
- b) Ecumenical dialogues have traditionally not included the theological and spiritual insights of all the people of God, e.g. women and others. Continued neglect of the piety and insights of others within the church will result in a poor ecumenical "harvest." If the church is indeed the whole baptized people of God, then it is imperative that we ensure full participation of all.

In this connection it is important for this Assembly to take note of the WCC's discussion "Toward a Common Understanding and Vision of the Council of Churches." Several LWF member churches have reacted or are in the process of reacting to the draft statement which has emerged through this process. We welcome the plea for closer contacts between the WCC and other Christian World Communions expressed in this draft. The LWF has already established forms of cooperation with the WCC in several areas, and we hope that other Christian World Communions will do the same. We are also open to future discussions — with the



Roman Catholic Church — and the WCC on joint ecumenical reflection and orientation. Such a “forum” could serve as a sign and expression of the oneness of the ecumenical movement. Moreover, it will serve as basis for better coordination of themes and other common concerns of the Assemblies of Christian World Communions and the WCC. Better coordination is not only needed for financial reasons but due to the recognition that ecumenical dialogues have furthered the search for Christian unity.

As the century draws to a close we can see the gap between rich and poor nations and communities growing at an alarming rate. The globalization of markets and the triumph of “free trade” have monopolized international attention in recent years and pose a major challenge for the churches in the years to come. The proclaimed benefits of trade liberalization are not being distributed fairly among nations and people, and the poor are the most at risk in this radical restructuring. How can we make heard the voice of the poor, the oppressed, the disadvantaged in a debate and process that has become, more than ever before, the province and privilege of the rich, powerful and the educated, but which affects all the world’s people? The churches are challenged to equip themselves for this task — to give a voice, even if it is the small voice in the wilderness, to the economically dispossessed.

Economic rationalists accept the theory that some of society must lose in the globalization of the world economy. This theory is unacceptable to the church. We believe that God has provided humankind with sufficient resources to afford a decent life. In this context I am encouraged by the 1997 Human Development Report recently

released by the UN Development Program, which challenges the governments of the world with a clear, specific, practical and affordable program for the global eradication of absolute poverty. As the report notes, lack of political commitment, not financial resources, is the real obstacle to poverty eradication.

We should also view with concern the current international tendency to focus on commercial engagement at the expense of human rights. Often this tendency is sought to be justified in terms of human rights — on the basis that increased economic prosperity will draw in its wake increased personal freedoms and greater respect for human rights. We know that this is not necessarily so. As long as the world economic system remains fundamentally unjust, and international trade continues to favor the rich at the expense of the poor, this discontinuity between commercial issues and human rights issues in international discourse can only be judged as being motivated by self-interest. The churches should address these issues in the interests of all.

Closely connected with economic injustice is the exploitation, for commercial and sexual purposes, of children. This problem is escalating and spreading worldwide, and almost every day we hear new and horrifying reports in the media. The exploitation of children, for sexual or any other purposes, cannot be tolerated. These children, as I impressed upon the Council in last September, are like all of us made in the image of God, and lay rightful claim to the promises of the gospel.

We have a significant investment in our youth. It does not suffice simply to establish a youth desk in our churches to allow the young people to entertain themselves. In my mother tongue the noun youth carries a connotation of



newness — *bacha*. Youth in my culture is not only young, full of dynamism, energy but the source and assurance for the community's renewal. Without *bacha* there is no hope of renewal. In this sense the youth desk is a very important instrument because it represents the source of renewal of the church and society as a whole. Therefore, let us invest enough time and financial resources in our youth for the sake of the church.

Equally, we are often guilty of ignoring the resources represented by our elders. It has often been said that in our modern world we no longer value the rich store of experience and wisdom of which our elders are the repository. We overlook them, as if they were of no value. When Dr Carl Mau, former LWF General Secretary, died in 1995 it occurred to me that one of the major resources of the LWF and its member churches are its people. The elders in our churches are graduates of the college of experience, where the tuition has been paid with their own sweat. These graduates are in every society, every church, every congregation. When we disregard or discard them, we diminish our churches and ourselves. The LWF ought to find space for its elders, and officially to recognize them with the title of "Elders of the Federation." I hope that the prominent participation by several of our elders in this Assembly, particularly in the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, will prompt further consideration of this issue.

### ***Bishop Ordass***

Having looked into the future, and before I proceed to conclude this address, I wish to reflect upon a difficult and painful episode in the LWF's past. As much as the LWF's history has been attended by joys, it has been beset by its fair share of difficulties and struggles.

The episode that I have in mind relates to the late Bishop Lajos Ordass of Hungary who was twice elected LWF vice-president (Lund 1947 and Minneapolis 1957). He was alleged by the then Communist state authorities to be involved in matters that threatened state security. That led to his detention and removal from his leadership role as bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. His detention prevented him from carrying out his vice-presidential responsibility fully. On several occasions the LWF leadership held meetings with state authorities to complain about this harassment. However on 29 June 1958, Bishop Ordass was removed from the position of bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hungary.

However in 1990 the Ordass case was reviewed by the Hungarian government, the council of the Southern District of the Lutheran Church in Hungary and, in 1995, the ecclesiastical court of the Lutheran Church of Hungary, issued official statements exonerating and rehabilitating Bishop Ordass posthumously. On 9 December 1996, I had the opportunity in the presence of leading bishops and other church leaders of the Lutheran churches in Europe to make a public statement in which I welcomed the decisions and actions of both the state and the church in exonerating Bishop Ordass. The LWF had never accepted the allegations against Bishop Ordass, and it is a matter of deep sadness and that he was made to suffer this trial before going on before us to join the cloud of witnesses above.

### ***Endowment fund***

In the last few years the international work of the church has been subjected to very difficult financial realities due, in part, to economic difficulties in those countries from where most of the finan-



cial support is coming. The other reason is the international currency fluctuation and devaluation. In order to minimize the impact of currency changes on the work of the LWF, the Council in 1995 approved the establishment of an Endowment Fund. An estimated capital investment of US\$ 50 million will generate an interest-based income for the Federation to fund the "core" work of the LWF. Therefore, I appeal to all member churches to do their utmost to support this initiative and vision.

I wish to conclude by reminding the Assembly that this is the last time in this century that the Assembly has come together. As it is we are standing on the connecting doorsteps at the end of one era and at the beginning of a new one. We are in "transit" and no better venue than Hong Kong, a city in transit, could

bring that message home. Last week I was among those invited to witness the handover of Hong Kong by the British authorities to the Chinese ones. I did not see very many material things which were handed over, except the taking down of the British flag and the hoisting of the Chinese and Hong Kong flags. The two words which were used interchangeably in everything said and done were "handover" and "return." What I sensed rather than saw was the "return" of courage, confidence and self-esteem among the Chinese people.

At this crucial moment when we prepare to enter a new era I pray for the return of courage, confidence and self-esteem which God has assured us through Christ in whom we are called to bear witness to the world.



## REPORT OF THE TREASURER

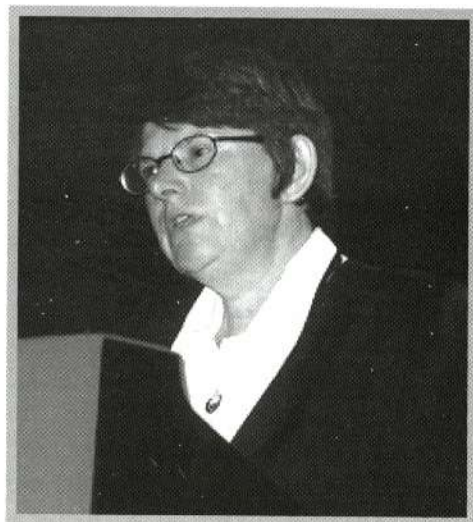
*Christina Rogestam*

### *Introductory remarks*

The past years have been a tough and challenging time for me as the Treasurer of the Federation, but were not without satisfaction. We witnessed an enormous increase of funds towards the year 1994 when we reached receipts for the total LWF activities of 130 million USD, the highest figure in LWF history. It was due to a substantial increase of receipts for emergency programs, which reached in 1994 35 million USD, i.e., 27 percent of all funds received. Now we are back at around 24 million USD for emergencies, which is the reason for a decrease in the overall income since then. In the seven-year report you have seen all these figures. Why are the receipts for the total LWF important? Is it important because we like a big budget? Well, as all finance people I prefer to have larger income than expenditures. The important thing is what we do with the money, our stewardship.

The LWF has been instrumental in the realization of many good and viable programs and projects during the time since the last Assembly in Curitiba. The different departments will report on their activities in more details in the session on "The LWF presents itself", therefore let me highlight only a few special programs and projects, which have made and will make a change in the life of the people involved.

Projects with major financial involvement of LWF member churches and agencies have been the airlift to Sudan to assist the population in the civil war, our support to the refugees around the Great Lakes, the support to



*Ms Christina Rogestam  
Treasurer of the Lutheran World  
Federation and Chief Executive of the  
Swedish Academic Building Corpora-  
tion, Gothenburg, Sweden*

the Lutheran Theological College in Makumira, Tanzania, the drinking water supply and micro-hydro electric power supply in Indonesia, the support of the different activities for the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute in India, the support of the many fascinating activities of women and youth, the many health and integrated rural development programs, the faithful support of minority churches, the efficient work of World Service in a forgotten country like Liberia, the repositioning of the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem and the Theological Paulinum Seminary in Namibia. Not to forget all the good and challenging programs of the Department for Theology and Studies, which have been well documented, and of the General Secretariat in the field of ecumenical affairs and international affairs and human rights. There will be much more



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information available on the activities of the Federation during these days of the Assembly.

### *Some overall observations*

In the report "From Curitiba to Hong Kong" we have given you an overview of the finances of the Federation since the last Assembly up to 1995. Now as the figures for 1996 are audited, we are able to give you an overview of the last six years. The LWF has registered during the time between the two Assemblies an overall income of USD 604.2 million, whereof USD 513.6 million were granted for programs, projects and emergencies. In addition, food and other assistance in kind — worth a few millions of USD — were received and distributed during this time. We are thankful for the generous contributions of the member churches and agencies towards our common work.

The positive development of the funds made available — in times of great financial and sometimes structural difficulties in parts of our constituency — shows that the confidence in the work of the LWF has been maintained not only by the member churches and their agencies, but also by many other organizations trusting in our competence.

It was very encouraging when the member churches in the South agreed at the Council meeting in Madras in 1992 to increase the minimum amounts for membership fees underlining their determination to contribute to the Federation's budget and their sense of ownership, and responsibility towards the Communion.

We notice with appreciation that many member churches in the South and East are enhancing their contributions for the common work of the Federation. This is good and healthy for the relationship of this communion of

churches. It is also very much desirable to see a reinforced sharing of resources as the basis for the future of the Federation.

But at the same time, I cannot withhold some disappointment I felt when member churches passed on their financial problems to us without prior consultation and not realizing the immediate negative impact on the finances of the Federation.

The budgets of the last seven years were developed under very difficult frame conditions. Not only were member churches increasingly suffering from economic constraints of their own, but we also experienced a dramatic worsening of the exchange rate of the USD and other currencies against the Swiss Franc. We had to deal with exchange rates never seen before in LWF history. The USD was at an all-time low against the Swiss Franc during this time. Also the DM and the Scandinavian currencies depreciated against the Swiss Franc. And, as I have reminded the Council every year, 1 cent change in the exchange rate between the USD and the CHF means 50,000 CHF; 10 cents immediately means 500,000 CHF more or less on the income side and the last couple of years it has mostly been less.

The Council in Chicago in 1991 had called for a study by eminent persons on the financial viability of the Federation. This "Panel on Financial Strategies" proposed a number of measures to stabilize the financial situation, which we highlighted in the report "From Curitiba to Hong Kong". Many of the proposed measures were implemented or tested out and still are on the agenda of the Secretariat in Geneva. The Panel stressed that the most decisive factor in shaping a new financial strategy is the commitment of the member churches to be a communion of churches.



*Overview of funds received  
by LWF (1991 - 1996)*

Over the past seven years, the pattern of income for projects, programs and emergencies has not changed very much. No totally new sources have been found. Donors like UNHCR and EU provide around one quarter of the funds like the German churches and agencies for the projects/programs, including the non-budgeted, and for emergencies. The Nordic churches and agencies provide 39 percent of the funds, North America provides 9 percent and 3 percent come from member churches in the South for the Federation's development, rehabilitation, communication and mission-related activities. The entrusted funds for projects and programs as well as emergencies were allocated to Africa (ca. 60 percent), Asia (18 percent), Europe and Latin America (9 percent each) and the remaining amount for interregional programs.

The new structure — decided by the Assembly in Curitiba — has resulted in cost reductions and made it possible to remain in the range between 16 million and 14 million Swiss Francs over the last six years compared to over 19 million Swiss Francs before the restructuring.

This consolidation of the expenditure was only possible through reduction of staff, further rationalization of the work, or keeping positions open for some time. The staff in Geneva has been reduced by 25 percent since Curitiba. It is true that keeping positions vacant was not always beneficial for the work to be done, but there was no other way to deal with realities. The workload for the staff of the Federation increased in this period.

Measures have also been taken to improve and strengthen the cooperation between the departments and units. The cooperation with the World Coun-

cil of Churches (WCC) was enhanced in the field of computerization, Ecumenical News Service, Action of Churches Together (ACT) and many other forms of common activities.

In 1996, the Council meeting in Geneva discussed the necessity of a comprehensive evaluation of the work of the different departments in order to further streamline their tasks and profiles. It is found that there is still some more room to improve the existing new structure for the benefit of the member churches. It was agreed at the Council in Geneva that this in-depth assessment should be done after the Assembly.

The pattern of the income for the work of the Geneva Secretariat has changed slightly compared to the situation in 1990. The income for the coordination cost for Geneva and the coordination cost of the World Service field offices comes mainly from the German churches and agencies, from the ELCA and Lutheran World Relief, Church of Sweden and Church of Sweden Aid, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and Finnchurchaid, the Church of Norway and Norwegian Church Aid, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and Canadian Lutheran World Relief and through UNHCR administrative fees and membership fees from member churches.

As good as it is to see an increase of membership fees over the last years up to USD 2.3 million in 1996, it is nevertheless only 19.5 percent of the income for the coordination budget in Geneva. This remains a matter of concern.

The same applies to our General Reserves. In the books we had about 4 million USD in the beginning of this year, which will cover between three to four months of the annual budget. This is by far not enough to secure the financial viability of the Federation.



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It is therefore our wish that measures be worked out to improve this situation within the next years.

The Council meeting in Namibia approved the repositioning of the Augusta Victoria Hospital in the holy city of Jerusalem. The LWF has served the Palestinians in this hospital since the Second World War. Due to a combination of factors — the peace agreements, the establishment of a Palestinian State which means that Palestinians are no longer considered refugees, the changing role of UNRWA and its decreasing financial resources, the cost of repositioning of the hospital, deficits in the running budget — the Federation is carrying now the overwhelming burden of this hospital. Not all promises and expectations to contribute financially to the running and investment costs have been honored, which leaves the Federation with a heavy financial burden and LWF has up till now prepaid some 5 million USD to cover costs which have not been covered by other sources.

By the end of this year it can mean that our general reserves will be down to covering about a month of the LWF annual cost. And that is very, very low. It has already affected the cash-flow of World Service and thereby also the cash-flow of LWF.

After an in-depth discussion in the Board of Trustees just before the Assembly steps are set out to try to find in 3-4 months a viable financial solution for both the Augusta Victoria Hospital and the Federation. Fundraising is going on and we are looking for new partnerships on the Mount of Olives.

In order to strengthen the signs of hope for the Palestinians, LWF will carry on and give service to the people of the West Bank and Jerusalem. I want to underline the importance of the special offering for the Augusta Victoria

Hospital in many of our member churches for the financial viability of both the hospital and the LWF as a whole. Together, we will be in a position to continue to serve on the Mount of Olives.

In this context, I want to underline the discussion on the plan to establish an LWF Endowment Fund. It became obvious that the Federation should develop its own Endowment Fund for the future. The uncertainty of the financial possibilities of member churches — very often also beyond their own control — calls for additional instruments to stabilize the finances of the Federation. The Council in September 1996 in Geneva agreed to establish the Endowment Fund. The General Secretary will propose the official launching of the LWF Endowment Fund next Sunday at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Federation.

### *Closing remarks*

The future of the Federation is depending on the needs and — most of all — the visions of our member churches. We call on all member churches, related agencies and mission societies to realize the vision of a Communion of Lutheran churches in which sharing of resources becomes an integral part of our life together. We will continue to engage the member churches in a greater ownership of our mutually committed work of the Federation. I am convinced that the Communion of Lutheran churches has a future when we all join hands to support the Federation's work, which is our common witness in the world and for which we are called by Jesus Christ.

# LETTER TO THE MEMBER CHURCHES OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

16 July 1997

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ. We, the 385 delegates to the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, together with the 663 other participants, greet you. "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life... we declare to you" (1 John 1:1ff).

We are meeting in Hong Kong, a busy Asian centre of trade and a powerful symbol of the secular world in which Christ calls us to witness. A few days ago Hong Kong was returned to China. The experience of transition has surrounded us with its overtones of uncertainty and hope. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of this Federation, we have gathered each day under a banner showing Christ with outstretched arms. Those arms have reminded us of the blessings of the increasing communion with one another in the last fifty years, but they also challenge us to remember the worldwide scope of God's love.

Christians are a very small minority in Hong Kong. That fact gives special urgency to the theme of this Assembly: "In Christ - Called to Witness". Each morning we gather for Bible study led by one of the seven regions represented in the Federation. We have listened to the words of 1 Peter 2:9-10: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." This assurance became the basis for



**THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**  
LUTHERISCHER WELTVERBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

General Secretariat

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The Assembly provided us with a rich and lively experience of our worldwide Lutheran Communion. We hope that the Assembly participants will share this experience with you in the churches. We listened to the voices of sisters and brothers from all parts of the world and heard about their joys and pains. We shared the excitement of confessing our common faith through a great diversity of expressions. We celebrated our spiritual communion in prayer, proclamation, hymns and Bible study. Our communion is a precious gift of God to us, committed to use care and responsibility and stretching out to the wider communion of all Christians.

During the Assembly we have experienced the hospitality and love of our Lutheran sisters and brothers in Hong Kong and have shared our communion with them. We have reviewed the work of the LWF during the last seven years since the Eighth Assembly at Curitiba (1990) and we have struggled under the pressure of time to outline directions for the life and work of the LWF in the coming years. We have welcomed ecumenical guests and reaffirmed our active participation in the

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President (outgoing)



Jørgen Nilsen  
General Secretary

cc: National Committees  
Council  
Related Agencies

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The Assembly provided us with a rich and lively experience of our worldwide



*Lutheran Communion. We hope that the Assembly participants will share this experience with you in the churches. We listened to the voices of sisters and brothers from all parts of the world and heard about their joys and pains. We shared the excitement of confessing our common faith through a great diversity of expressions. We celebrated our spiritual communion in prayer, proclamation, hymns and Bible study. Our communion is a precious gift of God to us, committed to our care and responsibility and stretching out to the wider communion of all Christians.*

*During the Assembly we have experienced the hospitality and love of our Lutheran sisters and brothers in Hong Kong and have shared our communion with them. We have reviewed the work of the LWF during the last seven years since the Eighth Assembly at Curitiba (1990) and we have struggled under the pressure of time to outline directions for the life and work of the LWF in the coming years. We have welcomed ecumenical guests and reaffirmed our active participation in the ecumenical movement. We elected a new Council and a new President of the LWF - Bishop Christian Krause from Germany - and they will carry special responsibility for the LWF during the coming period.*

*You will soon receive the results of the Ninth Assembly. In the resolutions, among others, we have:*

- *expressed gratitude for the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification the acceptance of which by the member churches and the Roman Catholic Church would be of historic significance on the road to fuller unity;*
- *welcomed the movement towards forms of full communion between Lutheran and Anglican churches in different parts of the world and the progress of dialogues with Orthodox,*

*Methodist, Reformed/Presbyterian, and other churches;*

- *made a priority of mission and evangelism now and in the coming years;*
- *urged all member churches to put pressure on governments and other institutions to liberate developing countries from the burden of international debt and to appeal to governments to raise the amount of Official Development Assistance;*
- *requested support for the churches and peace efforts in conflict situations in Africa;*
- *expressed our strong support for a global ban on landmines;*
- *reaffirmed the commitment of the LWF to the full inclusion and participation of women in church and society and to the goal of women's ordination in all member churches;*
- *asked for prayer and support for the poor and oppressed dalits in India;*
- *emphasized the care of the churches for people living with HIV/AIDS;*
- *encouraged the LWF and the member churches to participate actively in the struggle against illiteracy, and to promote the religious and leadership formation of young people;*
- *called for attention to and participation in the celebration of the year 2000 in Jerusalem.*

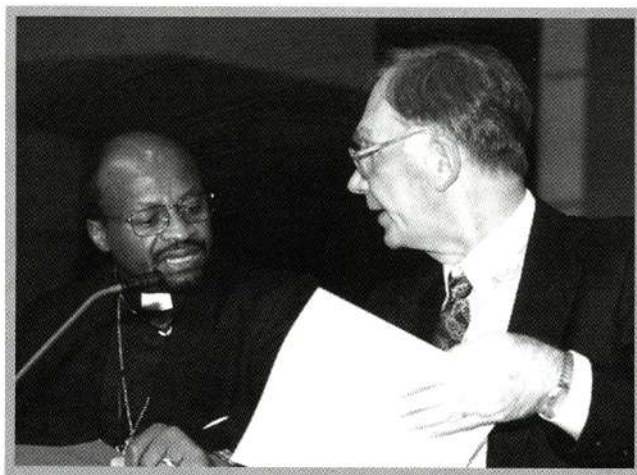
*In statements we have underlined the significance of Jerusalem as a city of two nations and three religions and the churches' task of reconciliation in the Middle East peace process; we have again called upon the LWF and the member churches to increase their efforts in promoting and defending religious freedom in all places; we have stated our support for ongoing peace talks concerning East Timor, and have expressed our commitment to the continuing support of human rights in all countries.*

*From this Assembly God sends us again into a world marked by these and many other problems. It is a world crying out for healing, justice, bread, care of creation, moral orientation and reliable hope. In Christ – we are called to witness in this world. Yet all too often we have not followed this call. We have failed to love God and our neighbours as we should. Therefore we pray that God's Holy Spirit may lead the LWF and its member churches to a renewal of our life and mission in order to become more adequate instruments of God's saving and transforming purpose for all humanity. We are*

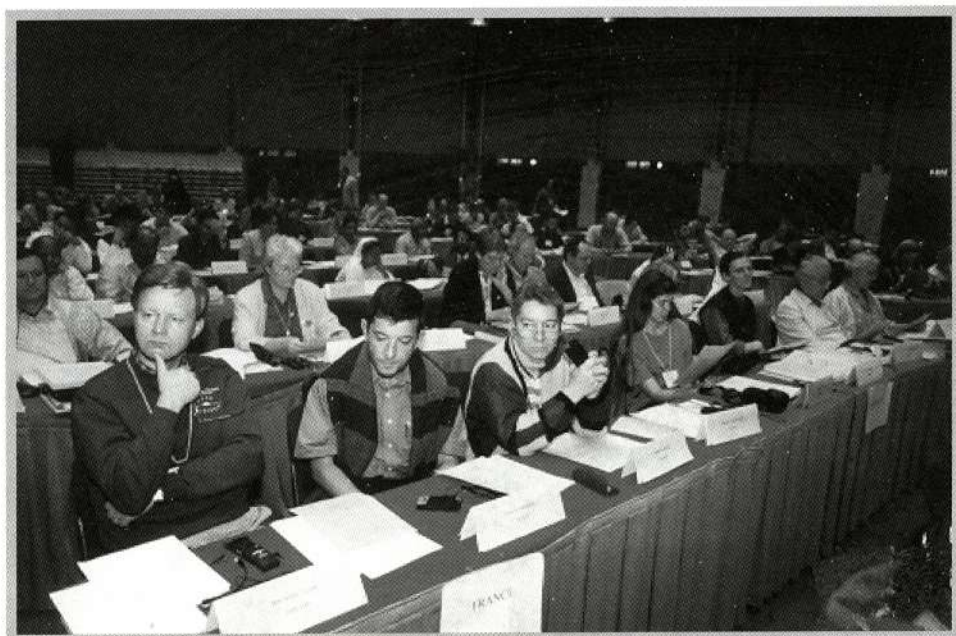
*most grateful for your prayers and support, and we invite you to continue with us our pilgrimage of faith. May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless and sustain our communion with one another so that we may joyfully praise God with one voice and serve God's world with many hands.*

*Yours in Christ,*

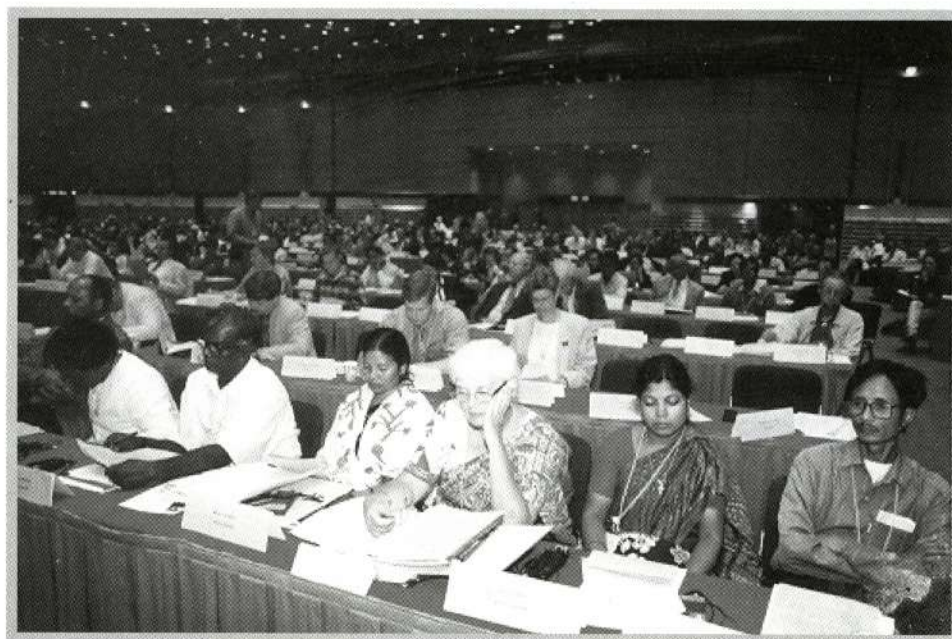
Gottfried Brakemeier  
Ishmael Noko  
President (outgoing)  
General Secretary







# REPORT AND COMMITMENTS OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION NINTH ASSEMBLY





## REPORTS AND COMMITMENTS

### *"IN CHRIST—CALLED TO WITNESS"*

#### *Preamble*

We have come to Hong Kong, China, in this Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in July 1997, because we have been called: called by the churches of the Lutheran communion to affirm and celebrate our life together, to reflect on the work of the Federation over the past seven years, to set priorities for the future. More fundamentally, we have come to Hong Kong as churches and persons called in Christ to witness to the gospel, the story of God's work in Christ and the Spirit, the good news which we have heard in the proclaimed Word and experienced in the communion of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Christ who has called us, we send this report and greeting to our sisters and brothers around the world.

During this Assembly we have felt Christ's presence in our midst, gathering us and sending us forth. We have been constantly reminded of this by the remarkable portrait of Christ at the front of the Assembly hall and on the Assembly poster which has been all around us here. In the picture by the Chinese artist Dr He Qi, Jesus stands with his arms outstretched, surrounded by persons who are not just figures from the New Testament, but are also the world to which Jesus reaches out: men and women, young and old. By the standards of the world, they may be good, bad, or indifferent, but they are all justified sinners in Christ.

For the first time, an LWF Assembly is meeting in Asia and we have come here from every corner of the globe. We have been greeted by Chinese Chris-

tians who have shared with us their witness within one of the most ancient cultures in the world, which is yet foreign to so many of us. Our immediate surrounding has been a cosmopolitan city, yet with its own specific history. Life together in the diversity of this Assembly has not always been easy. Our many languages, our many gifts, and also our many failings have been visible. It is Christ, however, who binds us together.

We have come to Hong Kong to express our solidarity with the Lutheran and other Christian churches here at the time of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. Transition brings with it both uncertainty and new possibilities. Together with the Chinese churches, we have here in Hong Kong heard the word of promise and assurance that Christ is with us "always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We have learned from the churches in Hong Kong and the mainland of China about their different experiences of the church and their missionary efforts. We leave Hong Kong with these churches in our hearts and ask that those who read or hear this report also keep these churches in their prayers.

We have here celebrated fifty years together in the Lutheran World Federation. Much has changed in fifty years, in both the world and the LWF. The Lutheran churches have grown together, so that today we can call ourselves a communion of churches. The visible face of the communion has changed, both to include churches from a greater variety of lands, as well as to include the

whole of the community of the baptized, especially women and youth, in all parts of its life. The cries of people in need have changed over fifty years, but they are still with us and can be heard among us. Reconciliation and aid to refugees have remained defining tasks of our communion and its structures. In this Assembly we have given thanks for the gifts we have been given within our history together and sought to discern lessons for the future into which we are called.

Witness in a diverse world to the diversity of God's work has many aspects, and so we have met here in smaller groups, "village groups," each with its own concern. The mosaic of this report, made up of the reports from these groups, forms a portrait of this assembly. As stones in a mosaic, the parts of this report differ somewhat in style and tone. These varied aspects are all needed for the full life and witness of the church; they are all part of the mission of Christ's community. We send this report out with the hope that it will be of use as we all seek in Christ to respond to the call to witness.

### *CALLED TO BE A COMMUNION IN CHRIST*

The outstretched arms of Christ gather us together into a communion which is the body of Christ. We know, however, that our communion and community are imperfect. There are many churches with which we cannot live out the communion we have been given in baptism. We have been encouraged by reports of new initiatives toward the greater visible unity of the church. Our unity within the Lutheran communion is not a final goal, but a significant step on the ecumenical way and a foretaste

of the greater unity Christ wills for his church.

Our communion is to be itself a witness in a world that lacks, longs for, and yet also fears community. In such a world, diversity can become a source of division and the occasion for hatred and injustice. We must confess that too often division occurs also in our churches.

### *Communion in a Divided World*

We are called in Christ into the communion gathered around Word and Sacrament, a communion engaged in mission and witness to the world. Communion is not something we achieve, it is a gift of God. This truth empowers us to the task of communion. We are to bear Christ's creating and redeeming Word to all the world.

We are called to witness to Christ in a dynamic, ever-changing, diverse, and divided world. Both within and outside the church, communion is broken and such brokenness manifests itself in poverty, violence, unjust economic structures, sexism, nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, war, unequal access to technologies, denominationalism, etc. In our brokenness we find the basis for life in communion anew only through reconciliation.

The church's worship is central to its witness. A joy of this Assembly has been the experience of common worship in which we have been joined in the one Spirit. Christian worshipers are called to risk believing our Lord's promises:

- that where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is among them; that the Christ has destroyed death and given us life in his victory;
- that the Lord promises that "those who hear you, hear me" (Luke 10:16);



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- that we receive the Lord's body and blood in Holy Communion;
- that Jesus empowers us to obedience as witnesses;
- that the Lord will come again in glory.

Therefore, the communion of saints is empowered to take risks as:

- reconcilers in a world of divided peoples and churches;
- intercessors for the forgotten, the lost and alone, the ignored, the displaced, the dispossessed and despised;
- givers and lovers and caretakers and sharers in a world bent on security, exploitation, consumption and possessions;
- servants in a world which worships its lords of false power and might.

In solidarity with other Christians we can act together manifesting new expressions of our given communion. Across the barriers created in both church and world we are called to work together to address the pressing issues of our times.

Communion implies a call and commitment to respond in Christ for the sake of the church and the wider society.

*We commit ourselves to*

- *engage in open and constructive dialogue with Lutheran churches outside the LWF and shall foster dialogue among its member churches in communion one with another;*
- *continue to encourage the church's exploration of and experiment with the concepts and forms of baptism, eucharist, and ministry (including such issues as episcopé, diaconal ministries, and women's ordination) in local, national and global expressions;*
- *model and witness God's reconciling activity in the world, moving beyond models of peace-keeping/arbitration/*

*mediation to offer Christ's forgiveness and reconciliation;*

### ***In pursuit of the greater visible unity of the church***

#### ***Joint Declaration on Justification***

For the sake of a common witness to Christ, we appreciate the great efforts that have been made to produce a "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JD) by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in which a consensus in basic truths is expressed and the relevant condemnations of the Reformation era are declared to be non-applicable to the partner today. We are grateful to be on the brink of this historic ecumenical achievement, which opens new perspectives of dialogue and common engagement between the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The task of the churches is now to judge whether they can affirm the consensus expressed in the JD as a whole and thus the twofold result summarized in JD 40-41.

Stating a consensus in questions of doctrine is not only a matter of theological inquiry and judgment, but also a matter of trust developed in many and manifold encounters, common engagement, and in the experience of believing together in Christ.

Justification by God's grace is the core of Christian faith. The doctrine of justification stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith. We deeply appreciate the affirmation here by the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of what is stated in #18 of the Joint Declaration: the doctrine of justification is an *indispensable* criterion for all the teaching and practice of the church. It represents the *basis* of our faith.

This process urges the Lutheran churches and the Catholic Church to continue their work on issues not yet solved, and to deepen and broaden the consensus and its consequences.

### *The ecumenical situation*

Particularly in the last three decades, the ecumenical movement has reached important steps and stages on the road toward unity. The relations between the churches have been significantly transformed at all levels. An overview of ecumenical life shows how different the ecumenical situation is in various parts of the world. In Europe, we are grateful to be witnesses of the reception process of the Leuenberg Agreement between Lutheran, Reformed and United churches, and of the signing of the Meissen Agreement and the Porvoo Common Statement. Meissen realizes a closer fellowship on the way to communion between the Church of England and the German Reformed, Lutheran and United churches; Porvoo establishes communion between four Anglican signatory churches of Britain and Ireland and six Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches. In the United States, the Lutheran church is considering full communion with the Episcopal (Anglican) church and also with three Reformed churches.

A resolution of the Council of the LWF in 1993 asked the member churches to inform the others when they are in a process of entering into a commitment with another church. This responsibility of being in communion becomes very important in a time when the future challenge will be the question of the compatibility of the different dialogues. Communion needs communication, the whole of the communion is concerned in the ecumenical actions of its individual members.

### *Reception*

There are different levels on which reception of ecumenical agreements should happen: the decision-making bodies of the churches who are responsible for binding doctrinal decisions, the local level, the theological level, and also in the worldwide communion of the Lutheran churches.

We urge our churches to undertake the process of reception *ecumenically*. Especially in the case of the JD, worship, Bible studies and theological work together with the Catholic partners should show the content and the existential importance of justification. In this way, the affirmations of the JD should be formulated in a language accessible to all believers, and its practical consequences in regard to a more comprehensive common service and witness should be explored.

### *Ecumenical commitment of the LWF*

Looking back on 50 years of growing ecumenical involvement of the LWF and grateful for all the work which was done in the bilateral dialogues,

*we commit ourselves to call upon the LWF and its member churches*

- *to continue the dialogues on international and regional levels;*
- *to continue implementing ecumenical activities in connection with the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) and with the resolution taken at the 1990 LWF Assembly at the local, national, and international levels;*
- *to ask the Lutheran member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to engage in the search for a new vision for the future development of the WCC;*
- *to request the Council and the Secretariat of the LWF to participate ac-*



*tively in present and future reflections on the future of the ecumenical movement and of more adequate instruments of this movement;*

- *to ask all the worldwide confessional and ecumenical church bodies to look for better coordination of programs and assemblies.*

We reaffirm our conviction that ecumenical commitment is an integral part of Lutheran confessional identity and recommit ourselves to participate fully in the one ecumenical movement.

### **CALLED TO BE A LIVING COMMUNITY**

The community Christ gathers does not live outside this world, but in particular locations and histories. Each church is called to be the one church of all times and places in its own place and time. How can the churches more truly be the body of Christ within their own specific cultural situation? How do we maintain our life together as a communion, yet each of us be rooted in our own culture?

The greater presence of women and youth at this Assembly than at previous Assemblies remind us of our past and present failures and future challenges as we seek to live out our community in Christ. The wholeness of our common life in Christ calls us to respect and encourage the diverse gifts of the body, the gifts of women and men, young and old. The concrete lives of our communities must be a witness to the God who calls us to communion in Christ and unites us in the Spirit.

### **In the Midst of Cultural Plurality: Incarnational Presence**

Our communities are located in different cultural settings. It is our call from our Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, always and everywhere, to look for the best possible cultural expressions of our faith and witness. Contextual witness, however, should take place in a global vision of unity in Christ. Such witness is part of the incarnational presence of Christ in the churches. In the future this should be especially considered in the following programmatic areas:

*Churches as living communities:* Christian communities are called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Therefore they are empowered to be witnessing, inclusive, tolerant, serving and caring, reconciling and inspired by the self-giving love of Christ, gathering regularly around Christ and in the Holy Spirit to receive the love of God and be enabled to bring it to the world.

*Contextual theology:* Theology is contextual in principle and develops within a concrete life situation. The theology of Luther was itself strongly contextual. Context challenges our theology. Contextual theology will reflect individual experience, keeping in mind the context of the community. Through his incarnation God has poured himself into "earthen vessels." The stories of Jesus in the New Testament give the paradigm of contextual theology and Christian life.

*Worship in the living community:* Worship takes place in our churches and congregations today in settings which are often multicultural. Cultural variety is not something which should divide us, but rather is an expression of God's creative work. Therefore we ask ourselves, how can worship be culturally sensitive? How do we retain the re-

relationship between affirmation and critique of all our cultures? Worship is one of the contextual expressions of a living community including their struggles and joys. It implies also confession of things which divide us. In our worship we are strengthened for inclusive community life.

*Christian education:* We commend the commitment of the LWF and its member churches to contextual Christian education and the existence and current implementation of Christian education programs which serve our living communities at every age level.

*Christian witness in the socio-political context:* Diverse political and cultural systems require diverse approaches. In spite of this we must stress one common task. We all bear a responsibility for the well-being of the society in which we live. Therefore we must seek forms of political engagement. These should not grow out of an interest in wielding of power but out of the obligation to follow Christ, even in his suffering. This engagement means working for *shalom* in society and taking up advocacy for the weak and oppressed.

In relation to these concerns, we commit ourselves to call upon our member churches:

- to promote cultural sensitivity and the growth of truly inclusive and loving community life in our congregations;
- to find symbols and forms of communion that communicate the gospel;
- to support local communities in the development of ways of worship reflecting their cultural contexts, with special attention to issues of hospitality, inclusive participation, and cultural inclusiveness;
- to further Christian education which is contextual and also prophetic;

- to encourage, empower, and accompany their members for responsible socio-political engagement;
- to carry out studies on the impact of the Christian faith on the development of participatory democratic structures.

### **Men and women: gender and the theology of the churches**

#### *Gender and our faith*

"What does it mean to be male or female?" This question of gender receives different answers in different societies. Gender expression is shaped by religious, ethnic, economic and cultural factors and value systems. Gender is not drawn from biological information only.

As baptized persons, joined to the death of Jesus in order to live his new life (Romans 6:3-6), we are called to a new reality: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). In Christ we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new creation is celebrated most profoundly in the Holy Communion where we all gather at the one table, without distinction or rank, to receive the body and blood of Christ in order to be the body of Christ in the world.

To speak about gender from a biblical and theological perspective leads us to affirm that our faith in the triune God calls us to acts of justice in these relationships, including equal regard for one another as men and women, the sharing of power and service, the recognition of gifts and establishment of structures which are accessible and hospitable to all of God's people.



*Issues we face*

**Leadership:** A balance is needed in our churches between men and women at the leadership level. At the local level, our gatherings often are made up by a majority of women, yet are led by a minority of men, reflecting society rather than being a prophetic sign of Christ breaking through the prevailing system. This affects women and men in destructive ways.

**Feminist theology:** Discussion of gender issues must have a biblical and theological basis. There is a need for a better understanding of the content and meaning of feminist/womanist theology to facilitate the gender discussion in the churches. Theology and education have been primarily male-oriented, although Jesus Christ invited both men and women to be his disciples and be witnesses to the world. Education and theology should be gender sensitive, helping both men and women to become more self-aware.

**Ordination of women:** The Lutheran World Federation supports the ordination of women and men as a gift from God to the church (Curitiba Assembly, 1990). We have heard here, however, that 30 percent of the member churches still do not ordain women. Member churches must continue to dialogue on this subject. In particular, the LWF should stand in solidarity with those women who seek ordination because they are called by God, but cannot be ordained because women's ordination is not practiced in their home church.

**Partnership:** We recognize the need for men and women to participate equally and consensually in the partnership of work; household management; care of children, the elderly, and sick; and life in church and community. Without this partnership women will

always be disadvantaged in competitive economic and social environments.

**Family:** We should foster a sound theological and inclusive understanding of family, and support a healthy family life through education concerning gender awareness, communication skills, for marriage and family life, skills for parenting, and household devotions. Pastoral care should be provided for individuals and families in need. We should also encourage reflection upon values and priorities in the relation between the need to earn a living and the needs of family life, especially the needs of children.

**Human sexuality:** The church needs always to remind itself of the fundamental goodness of human sexuality. Those practices that degrade sexuality must be condemned and combated, e.g., female genital mutilation, sex tourism and trafficking, prostitution, sexual abuse both within marriage (including the lack of the right to refuse intercourse) and outside marriage (including incest, sexual harassment, pedophilia). Our churches affirm fidelity as the norm for relationships of sexual intimacy while continuing to seek clarity about forms of partnership which have recently been the subject of debate among us (marriage, premarital cohabitation, homosexuality, single parenthood, divorce, etc.).

*We commit ourselves to call on the member churches of the LWF:*

- to actively examine, study and promote gender awareness as it impinges upon theology, education, economics, human sexuality (including sexual harassment, violence and abuse), power sharing in church and community, and family life;
- to discuss the Platform for Action of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women and its implementation;



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- to discuss the report "We Are Witnesses" from the 1995 LWF International Consultation on Women and implement its programs;
- to put into practice the decisions concerning women's ordination of the 1990 LWF Assembly and the 1995 meeting of the LWF Council in Windhoek.

### **As youth: from representation to participation**

With joy the Assembly has taken note of the message presented by the youth during their Pre-Assembly in Bangkok and their dreams looking forward to the year 2000 shared with us during our Assembly. Youth are vital for the present and future life of the church; youth are full members of the church today and not simply persons who wait to become the church of tomorrow. We want to enter the next millennium as reconciled generations. Young people need respect, independence and to be looked upon with trust.

Being Lutheran implies a focus on salvation through grace, faith, and baptism. Yet there is an urgent need in our churches to reflect this commitment, particularly in order to answer youth's search for spirituality, love and belonging. An open, non-moralistic, and authentic approach is required to reach the youth and to include them in developing and renewing congregations, church life, and liturgy.

Youth in church and society are a potential and challenge. Young people are still willing to take responsibility for the challenges and problems of today's world, both in church and society. Like any members of the body of Christ, we need to be equipped for this responsibility. We need a special, but adequate, structure for youth to assure an independent place for feedback and discus-

sion. Wherever empowerment is on the agenda, innovative and contextual approaches must be developed in order to be able to reach youth better. But there seems to be a lack of connection and communication between the church and its different youth structures. When it comes to designing the future plans of the church, young people often are made to wait passively for their turn, which usually comes after they are grown up. It is no wonder that many young people have difficulties in regarding the church of their parents as their church as well. Therefore, we call for sensitive mentorship (inter-age learning process) and exchange of experiences between generations in order to strengthen all to be qualified co-workers both in church and society.

Christian faith needs to be lived out in a vibrant spirituality. Especially among youth, there is a strong search for spirituality, which shows the need for a renewal of liturgical life. This renewal should be based on honest dialogue with youth and should include education on Lutheran theology and guidance in relation to traditional liturgy. We believe that Lutheran teaching and tradition give an answer and meeting point for the spiritual search of youth. Young people tend to live out their spirituality in a different way than that which they have learned in the church of their parents. We are called to seek ways of creating greater opportunities for youth involvement in the life of the church so that the honest spiritual concerns and talents of youth and other groups are included in the future development of church and society.

Youth can play an active and significant role in programs which combat various social problems. They should be encouraged to use their professional skills in the social services of the church.



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Programs equipping them in their involvement in the social issues should continue to be on the agenda of the churches and the LWF Youth Program.

Especially in the context of the wider communion of Lutheran churches and our ecumenical settings, we have a unique opportunity to develop models of youth work which will help us discover and utilize the positive potential of young people in the daily life of the church. It is our task to find common ground for participation of youth in the mission of the church. Leadership training programs for young people on the local, regional, and global levels should be part of the LWF Youth Program in the next period. Regional networking is needed to enable the sharing of experiences and resources. Young people who have taken part in the leadership training programs should be recognized and utilized as resource persons by their own churches.

*We commit ourselves*

- *to ensure that youth be granted an active participation in decisions in the LWF and its member churches at all levels and that the role of the younger members of the LWF Council as representatives and resource persons for the churches in their region be strengthened.*

### **CALLED TO BE A WITNESSING COMMUNITY**

In the picture we have had before us, Jesus' hands stretch out in invitation and healing to the whole world, gathering together a community of witness. An individual, a church, a community, a communion which has Christ cannot hide him: to witness is its way of being as well as its way of acting. We are called to witness in and within the world

around us, pictured by the artist in the diverse people around Jesus: persons conversing, women and men with the burdens and tools of their trades. It is into this world we are sent: an increasingly postmodern, fragmented but globalized world, a world where age-old greed finds new and more powerful forms of expression.

On Jesus' hands we can see the marks of his crucifixion. He suffers with the world he calls. The presence of Judas among those around Christ in the poster reminds us of our own willingness to inflict suffering for our own profit, our failure to challenge the global systems that foster poverty and death. Our witness to Christ cannot be separated from service to the world, stewardship of creation, and advocacy for all who suffer abuses of body, mind, soul, and spirit.

### ***In the midst of religious plurality: mission and dialogue***

As we near the dawn of the third millennium, we are keenly aware that all Lutheran churches exist and witness in contexts which are multireligious and multicultural. In each context, our witness to Christ must be sensitive to the particularities of context. As the gospel encounters a certain context, our witness finds concrete expression. For example, in Africa Christians live together with Muslims and adherents of African religion. In Asia, Christians are usually in a minority situation. In Western countries, which were traditionally Christian, we now find societies which are religiously and culturally plural and significantly shaped by secularism. Plurality challenges our witness, which must prove itself in relation to a growing relativism.

We recognize that witness is the basic task of the church. It is indispensable to our identity and integrity as Christians. As we read in 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to give answer to everyone who asks you to give reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

Based in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the Great Commandment (Luke 10:27) Christian witness necessarily includes evangelism and service. In our current religiously and culturally plural world we recognize that living together with people of different faiths is an unavoidable challenge to Christians and churches, engendering interfaith dialogue.

Evangelism means to share with *all* people the good news of God's love and mercy in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian witness needs to take account of the growing number of people who are adherents of other religions or practice a diffuse form of religiosity. Christian witness must focus on the basic content of Christian faith, use an understandable language, and relate to the real needs and expectations of the people. It should be an invitation to faith in Christ and to the experience of his transforming presence and power. Personal witness is as important as mutual encouragement in small groups. Our witness should reflect the joy which God brought to the whole world through Jesus Christ. We have a message to bring which has not lost its vitality and relevance for our present day life.

Interreligious dialogue is a creative engagement with people of other faiths. It takes place in various forms and is characterized by listening and sharing in a manner of mutual respect. With a spirit of humility and honesty, dialogue allows the possibility of working to-

gether as people of different faiths for the common good. We acknowledge that all are created by the one God, at work in the whole world. Such dialogue can also help us to be clearer about the expressions of our own faith. It should lead us to recognize others as they understand themselves. It helps find solutions to conflicts between different groups. It occurs through reflection as well as through practical approaches within everyday life. This does not diminish the truth claim of our faith in Jesus Christ, to whom we have been called to witness over against other religions.

Service is a necessary practical expression of our love of God and our neighbor. We are to care for others according to their needs. It is a form of witness to the community and for the community. Service includes advocating and pursuing justice in concrete ways.

The multifaith context challenges Christians to find appropriate approaches to pastoral care, e.g. in religiously mixed families, to people in hospitals, prisons etc. It also calls for an evaluation of the content and methods of theological and Christian education at different stages of church life. Christian witness should pay special attention to the religious and cultural backgrounds of those with whom we work, e.g. indigenous peoples.

*We commit ourselves*

- *to strengthen our missiological and missionary efforts, to deepen our understanding of the gospel, and to explore new ways of sharing God's love with people who do not yet or no longer know Christ as their Lord and Savior.*



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***Through Communication: Value, Power and the Information Society***

The Lutheran World Federation and its member churches have throughout their common history demonstrated a clear commitment to *communication* both as integral to the building up of ecclesial communion and as indispensable to effective witness in the world. Communication for both of these purposes has taken place in different contexts and through a wide variety of instruments. The need to maintain continual reflection on the comprehensive nature of communication, its relation to communion, the role of high technology, and the realities of the many contexts within which churches carry out their daily lives continues to be a matter of high priority.

Communion and communication require each other. The church is built up by that communication, with its Lord and among its members (communicants), which conveys grace, love, and care. The church, moreover, fulfills its mission and ministry by the credibility of its communication to the world in both word and witness. In a new information age, present throughout the world, the church has both a unique opportunity to deepen its life and, in Christ, to extend its witness, and a clear responsibility to make human all aspects of the world's communication enterprise.

With the dawn of the information age, new opportunities, new challenges, and new risks face the global communion of Lutheran churches in relation to communication. Developments are already massive and global, raising questions of great enormous ethical, political, social, and economic importance, issues of values and power in the information age.

New technologies such as the Internet and e-mail present unprecedented possibilities for witness, for the sharing of information, and for the deepening of relations both within and between churches. In this complex situation we have to reflect and study the limits — moral, practical, financial — to communication technology as well as the implications of globalization for communication. The uses and misuses of power in communication — ideological, technological, economic, political — need to be identified and located in both church and society. We have to strengthen democracy in communication and, given the gap between those who are “connected” and those who are “unconnected,” strive to achieve universal access to the information age and give a voice to “the voiceless.”

Within the framework of this new and global information age, the LWF's vision of communication in the service both of the churches and of the Federation itself stands in need of renewal and a clearer focus. The Internet, for example, requires new advocacy for all people's right to access to communication and information, new methods of specific training, and adaptations to become appropriate in the wide variety of contexts within which churches live and work. The balance, moreover, between communication based on high technology and other forms of communication and information distribution, including group media, needs to be reassessed. The use of the Internet should be encouraged, supported, and developed in LWF member churches. The LWF has to continue to develop its own presence on the Internet in a participatory, interactive way, and at the same time to maintain and develop its present communication activities.



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*We commit ourselves to call on member churches for a renewed fulfillment of our communication vocation which stands in the service of Christ and his church by the following:*

- *develop a comprehensive communication policy for the Lutheran communion, including communication within our churches on the grassroots level and giving due consideration to the work of ecumenical partners;*
- *develop a plan for developing Internet and e-mail capabilities and active access among LWF member churches, including technical and technological advice and training as well as financial support;*
- *explore new possibilities created by the Internet for the format and conduct of and participation in the LWF's Tenth Assembly;*
- *develop new programs to insure the full participation of women and men, young and old, in the communication activities of both the Federation and its member churches;*
- *engage in an ongoing critical theological, ecclesiological, ethical, and socio-political reflection on communication in the information age, in cooperation with centers of reflection on communication ethics, appropriate international organizations and political institutions, and ecumenical partners.*

### ***Through faithful stewardship of God's creation***

All creation is meant to share God's *shalom*. While humankind is called forth as God's "crown of creation" to have dominion over the works of God's hands, we have sinned in our supposition that dominion is to be exercised "over"

rather than "in and with" creation as a sign of service to God.

God's creating act and the incarnation of Christ bespeaks God's high regard for the material world. Redemption happens in the context and for the fulfillment of creation. The triune nature of God, whose image we bear reminds us that God's "communion identity" is to be reflected in humankind's activity in and with creation; through human being, ecology itself is meant to share in God's gracious, creative, gift of justification in Jesus Christ. Creation bears within it — even if as a mask — the inexhaustible presence of God.

These theological themes are important to help us see rightly and so to act rightly. But they are incomplete without urgent practical responses, and these must be of a holistic character. Some individuals may adopt an appropriate "ascetic" lifestyle that reminds us of early Christian lifestyles of sacrifice and simplicity. Others will find it appropriate to emphasize the God-given character of creation through prayer, corporate worship, the arts, and hospitality. Again, others will practice political and economic strategies, such as an environmental tithe, that redirect resources for the purposes of human justice and solidarity with the creation. Some churches themselves concretely practice political advocacy on behalf of the oppressed and the environment. We celebrate wherever these strategies have been practiced and encourage that further will and imagination be directed to similar ends. With such examples and more, countries should be urged to keep the commitments they made at the 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.



*Spiritual renewal:* The need for spiritual renewal is a challenge to us. We are called to return to our scriptural and theological traditions, but not in a narrow literalist, dogmatic, or parochial way. A purely "spiritualistic" reading of Scripture is neither pure nor spiritual. Scripture is to be read in its fullness, just as prayer and praise are incomplete without corresponding praxis in the environment. Theological traditions should also include a discussion of the theology of land. Our addiction to a secularist, materialistic consumerism has led to our spiritual impoverishment; there is such a thing as "death by bread alone." Spiritual renewal in this situation involves confession and repentance, as well as commitment to values and lifestyles which promote a just and sustainable global society. We call on the LWF to support churches and countries who face environmental destruction caused by dominant powers.

*Biotechnology:* We face a particular challenge from new developments in biotechnology. We are aided greatly in the engineering of more productive agricultural goods, but reliance on such technologies must not replace, e.g., the wisdom of crop rotation and wise land use derived from centuries of experience in local contexts. The alleviation of much physical suffering that will derive from genome research is a promise for much joy. But our joy should be tempered with such a Christian respect for God's creation that we not pretentiously "play God." Still, we are encouraged to assume our vocations as God's co-laborers for the increase of life in its goodness and fullness. We need to ask continually whether biotechnology promotes life in community and whether it closes the gap between rich and poor. Does the use of biotechnology lead to the praise of God? Is it at the

service of our witness to the Giver of life? The LWF can aid its member churches by supplying information regarding the state of biotechnology and its consequences, particularly where it negatively affects life and culture.

*Economy and ecology:* We are challenged by too much wealth in too few hands. The relation between economy and ecology is intimate. The disparity between the rich and poor grows. Air, land, sea and creatures commune in one *oikos* wherein all activity has an effect upon all. Within this house, large economies of multinational corporate life exercise power that both promises and enslaves. The underside is particularly clear where environmental degradation is reciprocally related to the increase of human poverty, especially for indigenous peoples. Our own church financial processes are involved in these global and corporate webs, so that it is a challenge for the church actually to practice socially just investment policies. Yet we are challenged to imagine and will solutions that enhance global community, such as the call for the restructuring of national debts of oppressed countries. If environmental health is not sought, keeping in mind generations upon generations to come, the negative consequences can only become the more severe.

*Stewardship:* We are challenged finally to reject a false understanding of "stewardship" that connotes anthropocentrism and imperialism, that would objectify the creation and lay it at humankind's disposal. Indeed, we need to move to a new concept of faithfully exercising our partnership with and in God's continuing creation. The challenges are great, but we will not be overwhelmed, because we are witnesses who are by God's grace in Christ.



*We commit ourselves to call upon the member churches:*

- *to dialogue with other churches, people of other faiths, the scientific community, and environmental groups about local priorities for environmental action;*
- *to work towards the implementation of Agenda 21 of the Rio Summit for sustainable development in our local context;*
- *to investigate bioethical issues and to offer pastoral care and counseling on bioethical problems.*

### *Through service amidst a suffering world*

After World War II, as the LWF was in formation, one out of every six Lutherans was a refugee or displaced person. This is an important fact of our common Lutheran heritage. The LWF was formed in large part as a way for Lutherans to band together to meet human need. Through this common service and God's reconciling word, Lutheran churches and people got to know each other better and grew closer. Wounds of war and deprivation were healed. Service then and now promotes unity.

With a long history of compassion for people in need and out of our special experience in this century as a church of refugees and uprooted people, Lutherans have placed a high value on ministries of service — in diakonia, development work, refugee and disaster response. This strong commitment to service is a mark of the Lutheran church.

In our work of service, we aim not only to alleviate suffering but to advocate for justice, to promote the inherent God-given dignity of each human being. Lutheran diaconic programs should be understood and carried out as part of a holistic ministry.

Much of human suffering is due to poverty. We live in a world of great contrasts: of hope and fear, of unprecedented human progress and unspeakable human misery. There is a growing gap between rich and poor, both within countries and between them.

We seek a world in which there is justice for the poor — in which all people can live a life of full human dignity, free of degradation and fear. These are among the elements which we see as crucial to achieving this goal of justice for all: food security, respect for human rights, education and literacy, advocacy — local, national, and international — to change unjust systems, sharing of resources, taking responsibility for one's own situation.

We have a special concern for those who are most marginalized: the poorest of the poor, those in vulnerable groups, those neglected or abandoned by government and the community, those who are forced to degrade their bodies or sacrifice their childhood in desperate attempt to survive.

As we work in service, we seek to strengthen organizations and institutions of civil society, especially in local communities. We recognize that many church institutions are financially dependent on outside sources, such as government or overseas donors. We strive for a healthy and sustainable balance involving self-reliance and sharing. We pray that we will not tire in the struggle, not give in to "donor fatigue." We pray that we will endure in solidarity.

*We strongly affirm our commitment:*

- *to give high priority to service and development work in the LWF, and indeed in the whole Lutheran communion. We affirm that this ministry of service — response to the neighbor in need — is a task not just for professionals but for the whole people of God;*



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- *lovingly to respond to all people in need, irrespective of their faith. We are called to do this work in collaboration with all people of goodwill and especially with other Christians as part of our ecumenical witness;*
- *to discern and address the causes of injustice and suffering in our world. Where we as individuals or in our churches, communities, or nations contribute to that suffering, we humbly pray that our eyes may be opened so that we might repent and amend our ways;*
- *to call on Lutherans everywhere to look afresh at our stewardship of the gifts with which God has blessed us. In particular, we call on Lutherans everywhere to tithe — to give back a tenth of that which God has given us. This ancient practice is a joyful way to show gratitude for God's gifts, a practical means for sharing our resources within the Lutheran communion, and a concrete manifestation of our eucharistic fellowship.*

#### ***Through advocacy: human rights, justice, peace and reconciliation***

The protection and promotion of human rights is an integral part of our witness. It is based on the love of God and not on the agendas of the political powers of the day. Human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as well as universal. It is against the integrated nature of God's creation to attempt to separate civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights or the rights of future generations. Whilst we respect cultural differences, such differences cannot be allowed to detract from the God-given dignity which resides in all human beings.

***Economic justice:*** The process of globalization increases the number of people being marginalized in our societ-

ies. Many people are deprived of their right to basic social security. In this reality it is of vital importance that national governments form national policies with the aim of fulfilling the government's duties according to the human rights conventions and use their power in the international financial and trade institutions in order for these institutions to become instruments for justice and human rights and not for the exploitation and violation of human rights. The churches too must find ways to effectively monitor and interpret developments in this arena, and to undertake determined advocacy with relevant governments and institutions.

***Rights of indigenous peoples:*** Rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination in relation to habitat, natural resources, and cultural identity continue to be oppressed by national states on all continents and to be undermined by economic activities of transnational corporations and other businesses. The human cost of this reality is suffering, lowering of self-esteem, dependency, and cultural deprivation. The LWF and its member churches are called:

- to support the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People;
- to give prophetic witness to national governments;
- to strengthen the rights of the communities of indigenous people at the local level.

***Rights of the child:*** The suffering of children compels us to make their support and protection an urgent priority. We are aware of the shocking statistics of the rape of children through child prostitution, child slavery, and trafficking of children. Conflicts within and between countries involve up to a quarter million young people in armed conflict. Discrimination of the girl-child takes many forms, including genital



mutilation and the abortion of female fetuses. We are particularly concerned about excuses or explanations of this violence on the basis of religious or cultural practices.

*Freedom of speech:* The freedom of speech and of peaceful protest is indispensable and must be respected in all societies and countries.

*Religious freedom:* No modern state that aspires to be respected as a democratic nation can ignore the issues of religious freedom and tolerance or continue to violate these fundamental human rights. No religion or religious institution can propagate its own faith at the expense of the innate freedom of every human being to accept or to reject any religion. As incidents of religious discrimination and intolerance appear to be increasing in all parts of the world, we call all our member churches and the ecumenical community to redouble their efforts in promoting and defending religious freedom in their own societies and internationally.

*Women's human rights:* Women's rights are human rights. Women are disproportionately affected by the unequal sharing of resources; in marginalized groups of refugees, indigenous and prison populations women are the most vulnerable. In many places, women are blocked from inheritance and property rights, and are less able to gain skills and education.

Violence against women is widespread in society, and happens also in the church and Christian homes. Violence is silenced, ignored, indirectly accepted and sometimes backed by biblical interpretations. We must confess and acknowledge the sin of the church in tolerating violence against women, especially the abuse of women within the church. Such abuse of ecclesiastical and spiritual power betrays a sacred

trust, distorts God's intent for human relationships and does violence to the nature of the church. Attention and resources need to be given to healing for abusers and victims, to assuring that congregations are a safe place for victims of abuse, and to educating men, women, and children about sexual violence and abuse.

*The rights of refugees, displaced persons, and migrants:* The LWF must continue its ministry with refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. There is a need for member churches to create more awareness among church members and their communities about the situation of refugees and migrants; member churches need to carry out a prophetic ministry to their governments to secure the principle of the right to asylum, the right of protection and voluntary repatriation; the right of dignified, just and humane treatment for immigrants and refugees in their own and other countries.

There is a need for materials dealing with the root causes of refugee flight, internal displacement and forced migration, concerning the prevention of conflicts, conflict resolution and peace building; ways to cope and live with emergency situations; and strategies to eradicate poverty and oppression.

*Peace and reconciliation/Consolidation of peace processes:* In national and international affairs, the LWF is called to facilitate dialogue, peace and reconciliation at all stages of the evolution of conflict. There seems to be a lack of commitment and effective attention on the part of the international community to the follow-up and implementation of concluded peace processes. Unless the original root causes of the conflict are addressed, human rights abuses will continue. The LWF is therefore called to support and accompany local initiatives



in pursuit of sustainable peace, justice, genuine reconciliation and the reconstruction of civil society, and the establishment of trust among peoples and nations.

Of crucial importance to these processes is the need to bear witness to the truth, and to address with integrity the injustices of the past. If not dealt with, following generations are doomed to recurrent conflict. Accordingly, the churches should set their face against the practice of impunity, whereby those guilty of human rights violations and injustices are not held to account for their deeds. The LWF supports the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court to facilitate the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of crimes against humanity and the member churches are called to undertake appropriate advocacy with their governments in support of this goal.

In addition to reconciliation amongst nations, we must not forget the need to foster and promote reconciliation at the grassroots level, where the victims are. Peace accords achieve nothing without reconciliation at the level of the victims. Education for peace and conflict resolution is the particular call of the churches, to bring about an acceptance of the other and to provide the foundation for peace and reconciliation at all levels, including within the churches.

On the basis of our theological understanding of the dignity of each person made in the image of God, we affirm the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

*Within this framework we commit ourselves*

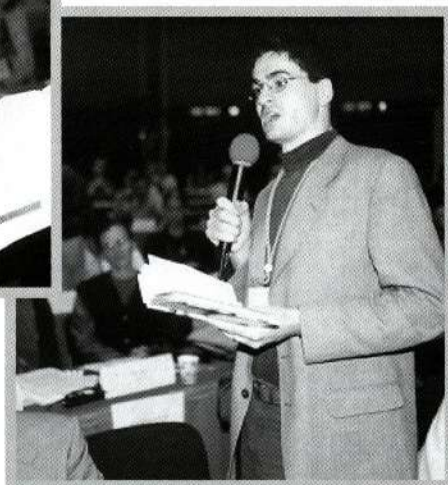
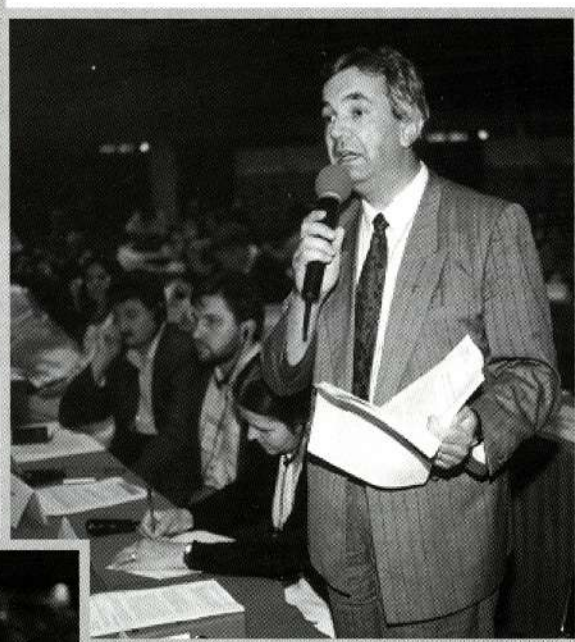
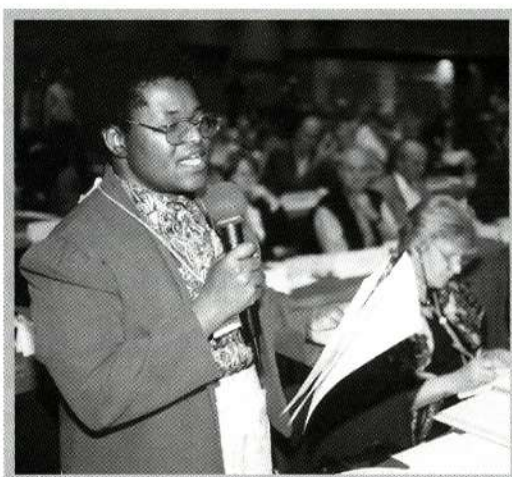
- *to see, listen and respond to those whose rights are violated; to examine and educate our own church communities for violations of human rights; to engage in political advocacy work to national and international bodies.*

### Conclusion

As this report shows, the work of this Assembly has been varied and intense. But we have done more than work; we have worshiped together, studied the Bible together, enjoyed the fellowship of the many-sided Lutheran communion. We have enjoyed the hospitality and shared in various way the life of the churches of Hong Kong, China, and Asia. We have experienced the embrace of the arms of Christ portrayed before us.

Many aspects of our experience cannot be captured in this report. It cannot fully convey the hope which has permeated our sessions: hope for the greater visible unity of the church, hope for new possibilities for women and youth in church and society, hope for a more comprehensive and effective witness, hope for peace and justice in the world. Our hope is not based on our judgments about the tendencies and powers immanent within the society around us. Our hope is in the Spirit, who opens up new possibilities. We leave this Assembly with a new sense of the call we receive from Christ and a new sense of the power of the Spirit who leads us: In Christ — called to witness.

# RESOLUTIONS AND STATEMENTS ADOPTED BY THE NINTH ASSEMBLY OF THE LWF AND BY THE LWF COUNCIL (17-18 JULY 1997)





## RESOLUTIONS

### Note:

*Due to lack of time, the Assembly referred some proposed resolutions to the Council for action. The Council acted upon these proposed resolutions at its meeting immediately following the Assembly.*

*The text in square brackets is an abbreviated introduction to the proposed resolution and not necessarily a quotation from the Council Minutes.*

### JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Responding to action regarding the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification at the 1996 meeting of the LWF Council, the Assembly:

- gives thanks for three decades of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue which has resulted in growing doctrinal convergence and ever deepening spiritual communion,
- expresses its gratitude for the completion of the Joint Declaration;
- notes with appreciation the contribution of LWF member churches in arriving at the final text of the Joint Declaration; and
- is grateful for the positive contributions by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church to the discussion in Hong Kong about justification.

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- affirms the work done on the Joint Declaration with thanksgiving to God;
- urges LWF member churches to study the Joint Declaration with care, and to respond by 1 May 1998 to the question put by the General Secretary in his letter of 26 February 1997;

- asks the Council to consider carefully and discuss the responses by the member churches to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and to determine whether a consensus among the member churches can be declared and, in case that it is unclear whether a *magnus consensus* can be declared, the Council should consult the member churches; and
- affirms the 1996 Council recommendation that the hoped-for completion of the Joint Declaration process be appropriately celebrated together with Roman Catholic partners with joy and thanksgiving to God.

### DIALOGUES OF THE LWF

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- notes with gratitude the reports about the dialogues of the LWF and its member churches with the Roman Catholic Church, with the Orthodox, Methodist and Reformed/Presbyterian churches;

- requests the Council and the churches involved to continue these dialogues and support the reception of their results; and
- welcomes with appreciation the report on the consultation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Anglican-Lutheran Relations**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

[Having noted the decisive official steps and various stages of reception that had already been taken between LWF member churches and churches of the Anglican Communion, and been informed of other discussions which were nearing completion,] the Council VOTED:

- to reaffirm and renew commitment to the goal of full communion with churches of the Anglican Communion and urged LWF member churches to take appropriate steps toward the realisation of that goal; and
- to affirm the continuation of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission and urged it to stimulate and assist the churches to take action which would lead, in appropriate ways, to the furtherance of full communion.

Furthermore, the Council noted with thanksgiving the Anglican-Lutheran agreements already in place and encouraged ever deepening relationships.

## **THE LWF AND ECUMENISM**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

The Council VOTED:

- to affirm that the LWF was part of the ecumenical movement and that Lutheran churches were, by definition, both confessional and ecumenical; and
- to work towards the development of structures within the ecumenical movement which affirmed the above by including the confessional families and were open for the Roman Catholic Church.

## **MISSION AND**

### **EVANGELISM EMPHASIS**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

[Aware of the manifold activities in the recent work of the LWF which were mission oriented, and in order to strengthen the emphasis on evangelisation in mission,] the Council VOTED:

- to affirm mission and evangelism as central to the task of the Federation and the member churches, and to ensure that the relevant departments coordinate their work on this emphasis;
- to ensure that high priority be given to inspiring and strengthening member churches for authentic and culture-sensitive witnessing to Christ in an increasingly plural and multi-religious world;
- to call member churches to fresh engagement in common witness in each local place and all places, and to give attention to how the ecumenical task of realising unity among churches might find expres-



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sion in mission and evangelisation;  
and

- to ensure that the exchange of experiences on mission praxis between the member churches be taken seriously.

### **ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

Be it resolved that the Assembly: recalls the decisions of the Eighth Assembly of the LWF, Curitiba, Brazil (1990), and of the LWF Council meeting in Windhoek, Namibia (1995) and votes:

- to reaffirm the commitment to women's ordination, as an expression of the communion of all baptized in Christ in giving witness to the gospel;
- to support the reflection and dialogue of the member churches on the issue of ordained ministry in a spirit of love and mutual respect;
- to undertake, through study, consultation and dialogue, practical efforts to open the way for women to enter the ordained ministry of all member churches;
- to work out the implications of the LWF as communion of churches in full fellowship for the ordained ministry; and
- to call upon all member churches to provide and intensify theological education for women and to facilitate the ordination of women.

### **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AS A MEANS OF FULL INCLUSION IN SOCIETY**

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- calls on the member churches and the LWF secretariat to:
  - promote economic literacy and leadership training workshops, seminars and consultations for women;
  - assign a percentage of the global budget to programs and projects which aim to empower women;
  - create programs of investment and small-scale credit accessible to women;
  - assure that the programs of the LWF Desk for Women in Church and Society are well funded;
  - re-affirm and follow up the goals of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, which ends in 1998;
  - instill gender awareness and make sure that gender is taken seriously in all projects to be developed by ensuring that they are considered and approved by a balanced gender group; and
- calls on the Council to ensure that only those theological schools which provide equal access to theological education for both women and men receive funds from the LWF.

## **WOMEN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

[Noting that the situation of women in society and in churches still needed to be improved, and the commitment contained on page 51 of the *Report and Commitments of the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation* to discuss the report *We are Witnesses* from the LWF's International Consultation on Women and to implement its programs,] the Council VOTED:

- to recommend to the member churches that they discuss and implement the Platform for Action of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women;
- to recommend to the member churches that they discuss and implement the report *We are Witnesses* from the 1995 LWF Consultation on Women; and
- to recommend to the member churches that they intensify the implementation of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

## **LUTHER ACADEMY OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF LATVIA**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

The Council [considered the motion that support for the Luther Academy be granted only when it had been assured that men and women would be granted equal access to all educational opportunities at this institution. It was informed that the project had gone

through the normal LWF screening channels and had been approved by the Project Committee for funding according to established criteria at the time, also that the Luther Academy did accept both male and female candidates. In view of this, and the opposition to withholding funds as a means of putting pressure on a church] VOTED:

- that it would not be appropriate to reopen discussions of projects already approved for funding, as was the case of the Luther Academy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia, and to apply new criteria in retrospect; and
- to ask the General Secretary to engage in dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia to discuss and advise on the implications of the Assembly resolutions concerning the empowerment of women as a means of full inclusion in society for any future support to the Luther Academy.

## **ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES**

Recognizing the human suffering caused by anti-personnel landmines, particularly to civilians in post-conflict situations;

Convinced that the humanitarian effects of anti-personnel landmines far outweigh their military utility;

Recognizing anti-personnel landmines as weapons which maim and kill indiscriminately in violation of international humanitarian law;

Recalling previous actions taken by four meetings of the LWF Council (Madras, 1992; Kristiansand, 1993; Windhoek, 1995; and Geneva, 1996) towards the elimination of anti-personnel landmines worldwide;

Be it resolved that the Assembly:



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- reaffirms its commitment to a comprehensive global ban on the production, use, trade and stockpiling of anti-personnel landmines; and strongly encourages all member churches to address their governments on the importance of meeting this goal;
- urges all member churches to request their governments to support the establishment of an international norm of prohibition through the "Ottawa Process" and to sign the international treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines in Ottawa in December of this year;
- encourages member churches to increase their efforts in raising awareness and stigmatizing anti-personnel landmines as inhumane weapons, and in supporting demining and victim assistance in mine-affected countries; and
- urges all member churches to support initiatives to address this problem within the United Nations system, including working for further ratification of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its amended Protocol II by countries which have not yet done so.

### **INCREASING OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

Recognizing the increase of poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor nations, deteriorating environmental problems and continuing violent conflicts especially in poor countries;

Recalling the United Nations World Conferences (Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992; Human Rights, Vienna, 1993; Population and Development, Cairo, 1994;

Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995; Women, Beijing, 1995; Food, Rome, 1996), in which the nations committed themselves to an integrated agenda to alleviate poverty, to address the indivisibility of human rights, to work for sustainable development and to achieve gender equity;

Recognizing the fact that Official Development Assistance (ODA) of rich countries has fallen to the level of 30 years ago (0.27% of Gross National Product [GNP]);

Emphasizing that ODA should not only be seen as a sign of basic justice and solidarity with poor nations, but as integral to achieving a sustainable and peaceful future for the whole planet and all nations;

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- urges all member churches, particularly in rich countries, to protest to their governments against the decrease in the levels of Official Development Assistance, and to admonish the governments to raise the amount of ODA to at least the 0.7% of GNP as recommended by the United Nations; and
- urges all member churches to strengthen their own practical and symbolic acts of solidarity with the poor and marginalized in all parts of the world.

### **RELIEVING INTERNATIONAL DEBT**

As the new millennium approaches, the LWF celebrates the message of liberation of the Year of Jubilee and lifts its voice for finalizing the international debt burden of developing countries.

Remembering that the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Assemblies of the LWF (Dar es Salaam, 1977; Budapest, 1984;

Curitiba, 1990) have all made important statements on economic justice;

Recalling that the Eighth Assembly of the LWF (Curitiba, 1990) also focussed on the foreign debt crisis and recommended that churches should "promote understanding of the need for a new international economic order" and "search for solutions to the debt crisis which is bringing such devastation to the underprivileged parts of the world";

Acknowledging that it is time to move from proposals to action;

Aware that, despite some significant steps which have been taken to alleviate the international debt burden, the 41 countries carrying the heaviest debt now have a total debt of 215 billion US dollars (USD), an increase from USD 183 billion in 1990 and from USD 55 billion in 1980;

Affirming the Jubilee 2000 Charter campaign of churches to reduce foreign debt and liberate the poorest nations from the burden of the backlog of unrepayable debt through the one-off remission of unrepayable debts of the poorest countries by the year 2000;

Emphasizing that the benefit of debt relief should be for human development and poverty eradication including education, health, loans and development initiatives for those suffering the worst from poverty;

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- urges the member churches to join the Jubilee 2000 Charter campaign; and
- urges the member churches to put pressure on their governments and the international institutions, and otherwise to make all possible efforts to reach the goal of liberation of the poorest countries from debt, and to find a just solution for the other countries as a celebration of the Year of Jubilee.

## *THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE CARE OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS*

Recognizing that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has intensified and continues to spread throughout the world, especially in the economically poor countries;

Recognizing that the people most affected by the HIV virus are the poorest of the poor, children, young and productive persons, women, the illiterate and the marginalized;

Recognizing that the HIV/AIDS problem should not only be approached from the medical point of view but also from the concern for human dignity and the right of the individual to enjoy the highest possible quality of life;

Convinced that HIV/AIDS is a disease like any other disease which should not be confused with moral diagnosis;

Recognizing that people living with HIV/AIDS are often neglected, rejected and ostracized by relatives, friends and society; and

Recognizing the churches' understanding of inclusiveness;

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- reaffirms all resolutions declared by the Lutheran World Federation on pastoral care, advocacy and alleviation of suffering for people living with HIV/AIDS; and
- urges the member churches to press towards the implementation of this and previously declared resolutions on HIV/AIDS into action.



## THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ILLITERACY

Taking into account that the impossibility of access to proper education is one of the decisive factors for the marginalization and impoverishment of large sectors of the world's population,

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- encourages member churches to participate actively in the struggle against illiteracy, and urges the LWF to prioritize projects which aim to improve education and training.

## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION CONCERNS

At the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Bangkok, language problems and the way to deal with them were recognized as very central issues which can make fruitful community and cooperation possible, but can also impede them.

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- asks the Council to review the language problems and take measures to improve communication; and
- gives all those who work within the ecumenical movement greater opportunities to learn one of the four working languages.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- urges the Council to continue and extend programs for leadership training for young people in local, regional and global cross-cultural settings; and
- urges the member churches to provide more education about the Lu-

theran comprehension of the Christian faith in order to equip young people for more effective dialogue with other faiths, and in their different ecumenical settings.

## TIMING OF THE PRE-ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE

As a part of the preparation of the youth delegates, not only to the Assembly, but also the regional pre-Assembly consultations, we request the LWF to hold the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference before these. This will allow the delegates to prepare perspectives on the issues, to consult their regional and national bodies, and get a better understanding of the structures and the nomination procedures.

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- requests the LWF in future to hold the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference before the regional pre-Assembly consultations; and
- asks the Council to encourage member churches to nominate those who are eligible to represent the voice of youth in the Council and provide an introduction of them to those participating in the next Pre-Assembly Youth Conference.

## FINAL MESSAGE OF THE PRE- ASSEMBLY YOUTH CONFERENCE

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

[The Council considered the motion that the final message of the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand, immediately prior to the Ninth Assembly, be distributed to the member churches of the LWF. As it was reported that the participants

in the PAYC had not reached consensus on the content of the message, and as there was, therefore, uncertainty as to its status,] the Council VOTED:

- to request LWF staff to review the material from the Pre-Assembly Youth Conference, including the group reports, in order to determine what would be the most appropriate material to be shared with the LWF member churches.

### **DALITS IN INDIA**

Who are Dalits? The Israelites were Dalits in Egypt. Samaritans were Dalits in the biblical context. Jesus is a Dalit because He suffered for our sake. We find Dalits all over the world, but in the Indian context it is different.

Dalit means poor and oppressed. Indian society is split into various races and castes. Those who are up in the caste ladder call themselves higher caste people. Those who are at the bottom of the caste ladder are outcasts or Dalits.

Christian Dalits have two problems. First, they are outcasts since they have sinned, according to Hinduism, in their previous lives and so they must be born in an outcast family to suffer. Even a baby born in the outcast family is considered as a sinner and unclean. Second, most Christian Dalits are below the poverty line. When a Hindu Dalit becomes a Buddhist or Sikh, he or she continues to get all the privileges that he or she got before from the central and state governments. As soon as a Hindu Dalit becomes a Christian, all stipends, job opportunities and allotment of free land are stopped.

If asked about this discrimination, the explanation given is that Buddhism and Sikhism are Indian religions and Christianity is a foreign religion. An-

other reason given is that Indian Christians are getting a lot of help from Christians in Europe and America. The two reasons are incorrect. Christianity was in India even in the 1st century. Sikhism came into existence only in the 19th century. The material help Christians receive from Western countries is used not only for poor Christians, but generally for all people.

In June 1997 non-Dalit Hindus burnt the houses of Dalits and nearly 100 people were killed. (There have been many such incidents like this in the recent past.) The reason is that the non-Dalits could not tolerate the rise of the Dalits. The Christian church has contributed a lot to the rise of poor Dalits.

Even now when Dalits are in trouble the church helps them without considering their religion, caste or community.

Christians in India today seek justice for the Christian church. But in a country where 98% are non-Christians it is difficult to get justice for Christian Dalits. Injustice has been done to Christian Dalits for more than 40 years by refusing help to them.

Non-Dalits suppress both non-Christian Dalits as well as Christian Dalits.

Hindu Dalits in most cases do not look at Christian Dalits as fellow sufferers. Hindu Dalits say that Christian Dalits, with the help of Western Christians, advance socially and economically and therefore do not need any help from the government.

Christian Dalits say that, because they are Christians, they do not get any help from the government.

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- encourages the member churches to pray for Christian Dalits so that the government provides help to them;



- rejects all oppressive systems and their related inhuman practices; and
- commits itself to stand in solidarity and support with all the member churches and others, in their struggle against oppression of Dalits, particularly that of Dalit Christians.

Otherwise Christian Dalits will remain only at the bottom of the caste ladder and will have to hear the name "out-cast" forever.

### WORKING FOR PEACE IN AFRICA

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

[While meeting in Asia, the Council's thoughts and prayers turned also to the many troubled regions of the African continent. It rejoiced in the renewal experienced in South Africa and elsewhere, and that Africa remained fundamentally a continent of hope. Nevertheless, it remained deeply concerned that genuine peace and reconciliation were still seriously lacking in many African countries.] The Council [called upon all member churches to continue to remember in their prayers the people, the churches, the humanitarian aid workers, and the workers for peace in the region of Africa, and] VOTED:

- to express concern for and solidarity with the peoples of Liberia as they prepare for the forthcoming elections, and that the member churches continue to accompany and support the establishment of a lasting peace and true reconciliation in that country; and, further, to call for the former warlords to respect the results of the elections and to put the

good of the people above their own ambitions;

- deploring the coup d'état in Sierra Leone, to call for the resolution of the situation through dialogue, and for the restoration of the democratic system;
- to ask the member churches to pray fervently about and raise up consciousness about the continuing human tragedy throughout the Great Lakes region, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in Sudan, and to call particularly upon the international community, governments, churches, ecumenical organisations and the peoples of the Great Lakes themselves to recognise and address the root causes of the killing and deprivation, including the continuing legacy of colonialism, the unbelievable hatred between people in the region and the hidden activity of external forces; and
- to acknowledge the lack of coordinated ecumenical response in relation to these crucial issues and to call upon the member churches to renew their commitment, their prayers, concern and active support for the peoples and the churches in all parts of Africa afflicted by war, injustice, and abuses of human rights.

## **YEAR 2000 CELEBRATIONS OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST**

As Christians celebrate the year 2000 of the birth of Christ,

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- calls upon the member churches to give significant attention to and participate actively in the anniversary year 2000 celebrations in Jerusalem, as arranged by the local churches, of the birth of Christ, to express their solidarity with local Christians. In Christ peace was born; through His presence, peace should be created in the land of the resurrection.

## **EVALUATION AND PRIORITY SETTING**

The Pre-Assembly Youth Conference in Bangkok expressed concern for the workload of the LWF secretariat and that whenever new projects are added others need to be cut.

For many Christian churches and organizations a major overload of assigned tasks are put to the employees. This is not only a potential for stress, but may also lead to inadequate human resources in those projects and tasks to be carried out.

It is easy to find new and important areas for work, but it is very difficult to cut out or finish projects since these also may be important.

Be it resolved that the Assembly:

- requests the Council to revise and evaluate the workload of LWF staff as soon as it is possible and to consider critically the current projects and tasks. This is to be evaluated with the intent of cutting out and finishing projects, in accordance with priorities set and the availability of resources.

## **THE LATE BISHOP LAJOS ORDASS**

*(Referred by the Assembly to the Council for action)*

The Council VOTED:

- to join in welcoming the decisions and actions of the government and the church in Hungary in exonerating the late Bishop Lajos Ordass from allegations which the Federation had never accepted.



## STATEMENTS

### STATEMENT ON JERUSALEM

As we approach the year 2000, with the peace process in the Middle East at a difficult stage and the status of Jerusalem still unresolved,

The Lutheran World Federation Ninth Assembly:

- reaffirms that Jerusalem is the city of two nations – Israel and Palestine – in which both practise their human and national rights;
- reiterates that Jerusalem is a city significant for three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – in which they practise their full rights of freedom of worship and religion for individuals and religious communities, as well as civil and historical rights which enable them to carry out their religious, educational, medical and other activities;
- states that the current settlement policy jeopardizes the peace process and that changes in the situation in Jerusalem with regard to demography and the land should take place only in the context of negotiations;
- calls on the Israeli government and the Palestinian National Authority to resume their political negotiations immediately so that suffering will be lessened and the development of extremism of various kinds will be curbed;
- affirms that peace cannot take root in the Middle East without a process of reconciliation in which the churches should have a role with regard to peace education and building mutual understanding and confidence;

- encourages the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan to continue ecumenically its dialogue among the adherents of the three major religions in order that the peoples can be reconciled and become a strong basis for a durable just peace among the Palestinians and Israelis; and
- affirms its willingness and efforts to promote awareness among the churches on this issue and facilitate dialogue until justice, peace and reconciliation abound.

### STATEMENT ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

No modern state that aspires to be respected as a democratic nation can ignore the issues of religious freedom and tolerance or continue to violate these fundamental human rights, which are enshrined in Article 18 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. No religion or institution can propagate its own faith at the expense of the innate freedom of every human being to accept or to reject any religion. "Fundamentalism", whether political or religious, is contrary to the basic values of human dignity and freedom and often violates fundamental human rights.

We confess that religious people are often the worst violators of this noble principle.

Many nations have excellent laws to protect all aspects of religious freedom, but their implementation is impeded by ideological or fundamentalist principles.

As incidents of religious discrimination and intolerance appear to be increasing in all parts of the world, even in countries with a strong human rights tradition, the Ninth Assembly of the

Lutheran World Federation recognizes the need to call all the member churches and the ecumenical community to redouble their efforts and to cooperate widely in promoting and defending religious freedom in their own societies and internationally.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998, the member churches are requested to focus on religious freedom in the context of other economic, social, cultural, civil and political human rights:

- through prayers and intercessions, Bible studies and worship;
- through educational materials, seminars and public manifestations;
- by participating in programs of cooperation with people of other faiths; and
- by interceding with state authorities and religious authorities wherever necessary in defence of individuals or groups whose rightful religious freedoms are being curtailed or denied.

The Assembly asks the General Secretary to present a comprehensive report to the Council in the year 2000 on the involvement of the member churches in promoting and defending religious freedom.

### *STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR*

The Assembly is concerned about the issue of East Timor, and strongly supports the ongoing peace talks between all parties. We expect and pray that in the not too distant future a solution which is agreed by all parties will be reached.

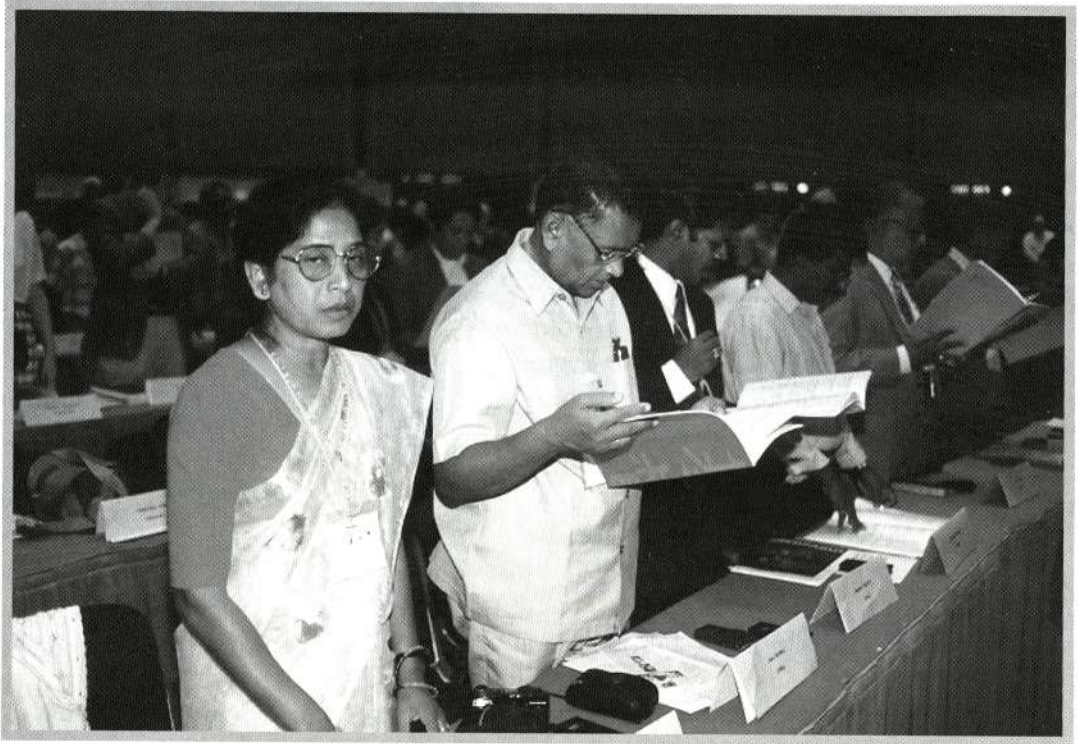
### *STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS*

In Christian love and concern, the Lutheran World Federation commits itself to continuing and persistent support for human rights in all countries throughout the world where people still yearn for justice and fundamental freedoms. The Lutheran World Federation makes this commitment as part of the worldwide Christian family and among the other faiths which desire and seek justice and peace, and expresses such commitment in prayer, advocacy, dialogue and solidarity.





## "IN CHRIST — CALLED TO WITNESS"





## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

*Choong Chee Pang**An autobiographical note*

I understand that in the West when addressing a formal gathering such as this, the speaker is usually not expected to say anything about himself. However, as an Asian and speaking in China this morning, I would like to ask for your kind permission to allow me to begin by saying something quite autobiographical so that you may appreciate the historical context from which I share with you this keynote address.

In a way there is no need for me to be apologetic about being autobiographical because there are many examples of this in both biblical and Christian traditions in which the messenger is hardly separable from the message. In the case of the Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, the apostles, Martin Luther and the host of other Christian disciples throughout the ages, the messenger and the message are intimately and profoundly one.

There is something unusually attractive, even "magical," about the year 1997. For China as a whole, and for the people of Hong Kong in particular, the year 1997 marks a most decisive turning point in history. 1997 is also the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as a communion of churches which share a common heritage of faith and tradition, perhaps even a common destiny. The year 1997 also has particular significance for my own Christian discipleship and pilgrimage. It happens to be the 40th anniversary of my own conversion. I was baptized on Easter day in the year 1957 at the age of 15.



*The Rev. Dr. Choong Chee Pang  
Professor of New Testament Studies at  
Trinity Theological College in Singapore*

This was how it began. A united Lutheran mission consisting of missionaries from Hong Kong, North America, Germany and Scandinavia came to West Malaysia in the 1950s. I was only a very young school kid when I was first approached by some Lutheran missionaries who served in my humble village and the neighboring regions, some 200 kilometers north of Kuala Lumpur. Typically of most Chinese in South East Asia, my religio-cultural background was a mixture of Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist traditions. And, like virtually all my peers at the time, my initial response to the Christian religion was skeptical and reactionary. This has a lot to do with our historical background. This was before the independence of Malaya which later became part of Malaysia. The British were still our colonial masters, and the books I read were predominantly Chinese, including history. I said to myself then, "After reading the history of China, including Hong Kong, since the time of the Opium War (1839-42), please don't



tell me any more about Christianity, the religion of the white, imperial and colonial masters." The Opium War, as we all know, was fought between China and Britain and was concluded with the signing of the "Treaty of Nanking," resulting, among other things, in the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain. This famous, or rather, notorious "unequal" treaty brought great humiliation to China and its people. This is one of the main reasons why the Sino-British negotiations on the transfer of Hong Kong back to the sovereignty of China have been so difficult, complicated and controversial. They have a lot to do with past history, humiliation, national pride and prejudice. Moreover, for better or for worse, Western Christian missions were also, rightly or wrongly, directly or indirectly, involved or implicated in the whole event. Following the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, some major trading ports along the coast of China were opened to foreign powers. This also provided easy entry for Western Christian missions into mainland China as well as certain privileges for them both on the mainland and the Hong Kong island.

I was only a 13-year-old village boy when I first reacted against the Lutheran mission. You can see how deep-seated was the pride and prejudice that an ordinary Chinese had against the Christian religion and its missionary activities in mainland China, Hong Kong as well as other parts of Asia. In light of this historical context isn't it amazing and incredible that such a prejudiced little young fellow like me should, some 40 years later, be standing here in this former British colony to give the keynote address to an international gathering of Lutheran leaders, some of whom are actually representatives of those Lutheran churches who first sent their

missionaries to West Malaysia, including my own humble village, some 40 years ago? I would like to take this wonderful opportunity to express my most profound gratitude to those of you who represent those churches in Hong Kong, America, Germany and Scandinavia.

*Addressing the theme of the  
Assembly: with special emphasis  
on Christian identity*

I am most thankful to the LWF for giving me the great honor to be the keynote speaker of this Assembly. I understand that it is my solemn duty to deliver the address based on the theme, In Christ — Called to Witness (*Assembly Study Book*, p. 12). As some of us know, the decision on the theme was the result of a rather long process. The theme was finally chosen for various reasons: first of all, it is *biblical*; secondly, it is *contextual*; thirdly, it is *mission- and action-oriented* (*ibid.*, p. 10). With reference to the theme of the Assembly, Dr Ishmael Noko, our general secretary, raises a number of questions in his Foreword to the *Assembly Study Book* (p. 8): "What does the theme of the Ninth Assembly mean for my church in its own context? What does it mean to be called — in Christ — to witness in this moment of history, both locally and globally? What message should the Ninth Assembly of the LWF send to the churches and to the world?" With regard to Dr Noko's last question — "What message should the Ninth Assembly of the LWF send to the churches and to the world?" — we ought to be thankful for the wonder of mass communication in our modern days and the presence of media representatives here in this Assembly, for we should have no difficulty sending a message "to the churches and to the world" when and if we find one. The question



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is clearly not that of *how* — *how* to communicate, because what we say here can instantly be heard in Beijing, Washington and other places, but *what*: *what* are the *contents* of our message?

Prof. Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier, president of the LWF, has also commented on the theme of the Assembly in the February 1997 issue of "LWF Today" (p. 3). "Witnesses live dangerously," he says. This is because Christians are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ who is the truth. And as President Brakemeier has pointed out, "There are too many people who are afraid of the truth" (*ibid.*). As such, "even in modern times Christian witness is felt to be threatening" (*ibid.*). This should remind us of what the Lord Jesus said to Pontius Pilate in John 18:37 when Jesus was put on trial before the Roman governor who was supposed to be the representative of one of the greatest empires on earth. "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth," said Jesus. Pilate replied, "What is truth?" The Roman governor clearly felt threatened by the witness of Jesus, because he was witnessing to the truth. In the end Pilate was not prepared to face up to the truth, although he had found no crime in Jesus and declared publicly three times that Jesus was innocent. Confronted with the threat of mob violence and under the pressure of popular demand, Pilate, the politician *par excellence*, decided to hand Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified. In the end, as a Roman official and judge, he failed to administer justice and betrayed his own conscience. Throughout the centuries there have been many "Pilates" everywhere. I personally find this historic and dramatic encounter between the Lord Jesus and Pontius Pilate very challenging existentially. It is

also morally and spiritually very uplifting. Existentially challenging, because similar encounters between the Christian witness and the authorities of the world are taking place all the time, even in our modern world, including the so-called postmodern Western world. On this, I agree totally with President Brakemeier when he says, "Increasingly, Christians live in a 'de-Christianized' world" (*ibid.*). "Wasn't the belief in a *Christian* world always an illusion?" he asks (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, even a senior scholar such as Prof. Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University seems to think that there is still such an anachronistic thing as the "Christian" West in his treatise on the "Clash of Civilizations." Referring to the Christian witness in the hostile and "de-Christianized" world, President Brakemeier thinks that our situation today "increasingly comes to resemble that of the early Christians" (*ibid.*). Yet, "to witness to the gospel is exciting," he concludes (*ibid.*).

### *Christian identity*

The theme of the Assembly — "In Christ — Called to Witness" — actually consists of two parts, i.e. *identity* and *witness*, although the two are inherently one. I will put the emphasis on identity in my address because the part on witness is well covered by our ten Assembly topics. The phrase "in Christ" points to the vital issue of Christian *identity*. It appears very frequently in Paul's writings. For Paul, to be "in Christ" means to be redeemed, liberated, forgiven, justified, sanctified and, ultimately, glorified. "Therefore if anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come," Paul gladly declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17. We are "in Christ." This is our Christian status and identity.



Yet the whole thing is *sola gratia*, by grace alone, as Paul immediately reminds us: “*All this* is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself” (*ibid.*, 5:18b). However, this status and identity must never be understood in any *static* way. The assurance of our Christian identity, “in Christ,” while comforting and encouraging in itself, must never be allowed to create a false sense of security in us and lead us to a life of complacency and inaction. Because “in Christ,” not only has God reconciled us to himself, he has also given us “the ministry of reconciliation” (*ibid.*). Writing to the communities which were widely scattered in various parts of the Roman Empire, the apostle Peter solemnly reminds them of their Christian identity as well as their call to witness. “You are a chosen race . . . God’s own people,” says Peter. As such, the calling of the Christian is to witness to “the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). There is of course a deep sense of responsibility and compulsion in Christian witness. Yet, it is also something very spontaneous and joyful.

As Christians, we have constantly to struggle with the questions of *who* (i.e., our identity) and *what* (i.e., our witness). The two are inherently one. To a very large extent, *who* we are determines the kind of witness that we are called to. On the other hand, *what* we do in our witness also demonstrates concretely *who* we are. Ultimately, it is our witness that gives meaning and content to our identity.

#### *Identity crisis now and then*

Throughout the history of God’s people, whenever a crisis occurred in the community, it often, if not always, began with a *crisis of identity*. Listen, for

example, to the words of Yahweh which came to the prophet Isaiah for his unfaithful people:

*The ox knows its owner  
and the ass its master’s crib  
but Israel does not know,  
my people does not understand*  
(Isaiah 1:3)

Israel was obviously in a deep identity crisis: not knowing and not understanding who it was. As such, it could only maintain the *status quo* and keep the religious institutions and cultic activities going. Yes, there was still plenty of religiosity and its outward manifestations, but credible witness, consistent life and lifestyle were simply not there. Love, care, justice and righteousness, those genuine qualities of religious and moral life that Yahweh required of his own people, were almost completely absent (*ibid.*, 1:11–17; see also Amos 5:21–24).

Identity crisis naturally assumed a particular context in which the crisis occurred, whether it was in the time of the prophet Isaiah or in the days of the apostle Peter. In the case of Peter, the context was that of a gigantic, pluralistic and cosmopolitan Roman Empire where all sorts of religions and ideologies were competing fiercely to claim the allegiance of their potential converts. Towards the Christians, the attitude of the Greco-Roman society was generally hostile, and its hostility made it extremely difficult for the faithful Christians to feel at home in it. Certain terms in Peter’s letter, such as “dispersion,” “strangers,” “aliens” and “exiles,” were not used casually, but consciously and deliberately. They were meant to remind the Christians of their identity. That is, in relation to the hostile world, in terms of its direction, philosophy, mentality, value systems, life and lifestyle, the Christians were to regard



themselves as “strangers” and “aliens.” As faithful witnesses to Christ they were expected to think and live very differently: “Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). “Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh” (2:11). However, this was not to suggest that the Christians should isolate themselves from the world, or to run away from it. For, to do so would be absolutely irresponsible. It would be an outright denial of their Christian identity and witness. In fact, quite the contrary, the Christians’ determination not to be conformed to the world was for the sake of witness. Their refusal to follow the ways of the world was, paradoxically, for the sake of true incarnation and for responsible involvement in the affairs of the world. This “constructive engagement” with the world was, however, a very risky business, for it exposed the Christians completely and made them very vulnerable. Yet the faithful disciples of Christ could not choose otherwise. For this, and this alone, was the way of Christ which was the way of the cross. It was costly and it will always remain so. Yet, the teaching of Peter was positive and dynamic: “maintain good conduct among the Gentiles” (2:12). “Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (2:16,17). There was also a legitimate place for Christian apologetics: “But even if you do suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your

conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (3:14–16).

The Greco-Roman world, like any other world, was an arena for the battle of the mind. It requires a mature, well-informed and independent Christian mind to witness effectively and convincingly. No wonder the apostle Peter asks the Christians to “gird up” their minds and be “sober” (1:13). The Christian mind is different from other “minds” because it has an eschatological dimension and perspective. It is set upon a glorious and inspiring “hope” that is in Christ (*ibid.*). Peter reminds the suffering Christians right from beginning of his letter that they “have been born anew to a *living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1:3). The apostle Paul is equally aware of the vital importance of the Christian mind in life and witness when he says, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2). “Brethren [sisters and brothers] ... in thinking be mature,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:20. Paul was a profoundly spiritual person as well as a solid intellectual. For him, it is vital to keep the Christian spirit and mind constantly in good balance: “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Corinthians 14:15). This good balance between the spirit and the mind seems to be desperately lacking in the church today.

The Lord Jesus also has quite a lot to say about the Christian identity and witness in relation to the world in John 17. In his “high-priestly prayer,” the disciples are regarded as those who have



received his "words" (17:8) and therefore are "not of the world" even as he himself is "not of the world" (17:14). Just as Jesus consecrated himself in his incarnation, it was also his prayer that the disciples might also be "consecrated in truth" (17:19). Only when the Christian identity was defined and accepted were the disciples ready to be sent into the world for witness, just as the Lord Jesus himself was sent into the same world to bear witness to the truth: "As thou [heavenly Father] didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (17:18).

The question of identity was not unique to God's people of old. Nor was it new to the Christian disciples. Even the Lord Jesus himself had constantly to struggle with it and to reaffirm it repeatedly in moments of crisis. Before the inauguration of his mission, when tempted by the devil in the wilderness, his identity was at stake when the devil challenged him: "*If you are the son of God* command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matthew 4:3). "*If you are the son of God*, throw yourself down ..." (4:6). And finally, having shown Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," (4:8) the devil said, "all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (4:9). At one stage, even John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, had serious doubt about the identity of Jesus. He thus sent two of his own disciples to Jesus, saying, "Are you he who is to come [i.e., the expected Messiah], or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7:19). Jesus cleared the doubt of John by referring to his own witness in *words and deeds*: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have

good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22).

For those of us who are now "in Christ" and are "called to witness," what shall we say and how shall we respond if the skeptical and cynical world raises serious questions about our identity and witness today? Should we tell the world that "we are members of the LWF and our membership worldwide is nearly 60 million strong; the secretariat is located in Geneva, sharing the same office block with the World Council of Churches (WCC); we are actively involved in various avenues of service through our several departments and desks; our financial resources come mainly from the North, especially Germany and the Nordic countries ...; we are committed to development rather than evangelism and we are rather outspoken on human rights and women's issues . . . and these are basically what we are and what we try to do in this international communion of Lutherans." We all agree that to work and fight for these issues is not wrong but, dear delegates to the Ninth Assembly of the LWF, do we honestly think that the world will take us seriously if that is all we have to say about our identity and witness? If there ever was an opportune time for us to reflect on our *raison d'être*, it would probably be this historic gathering here in Hong Kong on the occasion of our 50th anniversary and the Ninth Assembly.

The identity of Jesus was a serious problem even with his own disciples, so that Jesus had to confront them with a most direct question: "Who do *you* say that I am?" (Mark 8:29a). Although Peter, speaking for the rest of the 12, did give the right answer — "You are the Christ" (8:29b) — his subsequent attempt to try to stop Jesus from taking up the cross only showed that he had



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not quite grasped the profound meaning of the true identity of Jesus and his witness. Thus, instead of having the mind of Christ, Peter became, unwittingly, the spokesman for Satan (Mark 8:31-33). Let us humbly take this as a serious warning for ourselves. Is it possible for us, whether as a world body, or as a member church, even as an individual, to have failed to know our identity and witness clearly, so much so that instead of being authentic witnesses for Christ, we allow ourselves to be instruments of the devil?

Finally, this question of identity lingered on even during the last moments of Jesus' life. According to the witness of Mark, "It was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'the King of the Jews'" (15:25,26). The chief priests and others mocked him, "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross, that we may see and believe" (15:31,32). Long after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, this title "the King of the Jews" probably remained for some time on the cross. While the Jewish leaders clearly rejected it, it must have continued to disturb the mind and conscience of Pontius Pilate. Nearly 2,000 years later the very identity of Jesus of Nazareth is still very enigmatic in the mind of many modern men and women. How to convince these people by our words and deeds that this Jesus whom the Jews and Romans crucified was indeed *the Christ*, the Savior of the world, is still the awesome task of those who dare to call themselves Christians. Besides worship, fellowship and celebration, it is, I believe, particularly for *this task* that we have taken the great trouble to be here for the Ninth Assembly.

### **Brief comments**

#### ***on some assembly issues***

This is an Assembly that represents almost 60 million Lutherans of 122 LWF member churches and 68 countries of all continents. The diversity itself is simply overwhelming. The question for me is: How to bring out a message that can possibly be relevant to the concerns of our members and hopefully meet some of their many expectations?

#### ***The Churches' agenda***

The areas of concerns of this Assembly are very comprehensive and they are clearly reflected in the ten topical issues that have been identified (*Assembly Study Book*, p. 12). Looking at these ten topical issues, which are not only comprehensive but are also very existential and contextual, no one can justly criticize the LWF for being irrelevant and aloof. Some of the issues naturally fall within the confines of the church itself, issues such as commitment to church unity, communion, gender and theology. But the majority of the issues are mission- and action-oriented, such as Christian witness in a world of religious and cultural plurality; values, power and the information society; stewardship of God's creation; human rights, peace and reconciliation.

As a community "In Christ — Called to Witness," the church is expected to be an active and dynamic entity. As such, the church must set an agenda for itself instead of just passively responding to the agenda set by the world. Many in the church today feel rather strongly that the church has given in too much to the world and has thus lost its initiative and leadership in many crucial areas. They therefore suggest that the church should stop this disturbing trend with all the resources at its disposal and set its own agenda. This



concern is apparently legitimate and laudable. However, there are also those who, while not denying the legitimacy of this concern all together, somehow feel that the suggestion is just too idealistic, if not somewhat presumptuous. The reality perhaps lies somewhere between the two positions. To simply allow the world to dictate and set the agenda for the church would be tragic and ultimately defeatist and suicidal. As a living entity engaged in witness and service the church must consciously and actively set a certain basic agenda for itself and respond realistically and courageously to those important issues raised by the world at the same time.

Moreover, even granted that the ten major Assembly issues are the common concerns of LWF member churches, the degree of interest and intensity that we individually respond to them and the order of priority that we give them may be quite different due to the diversity of our socio-politico-cultural backgrounds and contexts. For example, concerns for the environment, human rights and gender issues may have far greater priority in the developed regions of the world, especially in the postmodern North, than in the South. On the other hand, the problems of poverty and suffering and the challenge of non-Christian religions and cultures could be far more pressing for the smaller churches in the South. As such, bread and butter rather than ideologies and evangelism rather than academic religious dialogues may occupy a higher priority in the member churches of the South.

Here I vividly recall a very lively discussion that took place at the Divinity School of Harvard University in 1984 when I was a visiting scholar there. In the discussion, an American church leader and theologian who came originally from Europe was challenging the

legitimate place of evangelism in the so-called post-Christian era. But a Christian convert from West Africa defended the practice of evangelism most vigorously, based on his understanding of the Great Commission. As the debate continued, I was asked to give my opinion. As a Christian convert myself, I simply said, "While our friends in the North might think that historically they have already entered the so-called post-Christian and postmodern era, some of us from the South are still in our 'apostolic age' and are just beginning to write the early chapters of our own versions of the 'Book of Acts.' For example, my own church — the small Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore — is only 30 years old. Moreover, many ethnic and tribal communities in the South are still waiting for the translation of the Holy Bible in their own native tongues. It is sometime said that there are actually more Buddhist temples than individual Christians in Thailand." In the end I was glad that my humble remark was appreciated by those who held opposing views at the discussion. It was appreciated, not because it was in anywhere very profound, but rather because it was just the harsh reality that we face today.

For years the LWF has been engaged in dialogues and discussion with non-Lutheran members of the Christian community worldwide regarding fellowship and communion, sacraments and ordination etc. There is even the real possibility that a joint statement on the doctrine of justification with the Roman Catholic Church may soon be adopted and announced publicly. All this we do in the name of church unity and communion in a divided world. However, very sadly, every now and then we are still greatly troubled and disturbed by problems of serious divi-



sions and fights even within the LWF member churches. And even now when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the LWF in this Ninth Assembly, we are still painfully aware of the sad reality that there are 3,640,447 Lutherans who, for whatever reasons, are still outside the constituency of the Federation which consciously aims at becoming a true communion rather than a mere organization. There is clearly a need, by the grace of God and with the spirit of perseverance, strong commitment, and determination, to set our own house in order. Otherwise, our united witness in the whole Christian church as well as before the unbelieving world will not be very credible and effective.

Before coming to the Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, I am sure many of us had already spent a lot of time, money and energy with our continentally based pre-Assembly consultations. I attended one of them. Honestly, I got the impression that some of us were perhaps more interested in getting our own candidates, even ourselves, elected to the new leadership positions as the next president or executive members of the Federation than in some of the burning issues that were on the agenda.

Whatever the case may be, I am inclined to think that the diversity of our backgrounds, contexts, viewpoints, perceptions and expectations are going to be manifested and reflected as we interact with one another in our many formal sessions as well as in our private and personal meetings and encounters. We must therefore learn how to "speak the truth in love," according to the wise counsel of the apostle Paul. (Ephesians 4:15). Only then are we able "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together

by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15.16).

It is obviously impossible in my keynote address to comment on all ten topical issues of the Assembly extensively. Yet, I would have failed in the task given to me if I did not somehow try to touch on a couple of them briefly.

### *The issue on "called to faithful stewardship of God's creation"*

The *Assembly Study Book* states:

Never before has the Christian call to faithful stewardship been more urgent. Ecological threats challenge the churches to work towards and advocate for a sustainable future. This work needs to be grounded in a sound theology of creation. How does our role as stewards of God's creation affect issues such as global warming, desertification, over-consumption and gene technology? (p. 115).

I am sure the urgency and challenge of the issue require no further elaboration. As a Christian community "a sound theology of creation" is perhaps the most valuable and much needed contribution that we can possibly make to the secular world on the subject. There will of course always be those cynics and sceptics who are unlikely to take our theological position seriously. Yet, at the same time, let us be sure that there will also be those who are quite willing to grant us a fair hearing when our case is properly presented. Let me just cite an example. In 1988 I was given a rather rare opportunity for the first time to teach a course on the history of Christian thought to a group of students in a top university in China. My first lecture was on the doctrine of creation. After much prayer and thought over



the matter, I finally decided to handle the subject in a rather unconventional manner. Instead of doing it in the way that we have been taught to do by our church dogmatists or systematicians, I decided to approach this delicate subject contextually and existentially. I began by referring the students to the unprecedented ecological crisis that is now threatening China, and I quoted from authoritative Chinese sources — including the grave concern of the director of the China Academy of Sciences — to substantiate my point. And having succeeded in convincing the students of the serious nature of the case, I went on to give a theological perspective on the crisis with special emphasis on human *stewardship* and *accountability* in the context of a *tripartite* relationship between the Creator-God, humans (God's stewards) and the rest of the created order. I was rather surprised that my "theological explanation," however inadequate, somehow made sense to the students who majored in philosophy. At least they found my explanation coherent, logical and intelligible. But had I begun with the conventional approach, I would most probably have ended up with a direct confrontation between the "creationist" and "evolutionist" positions, for my students were well initiated into Darwinism as well as dialectical materialism.

*The issue on "Christian witness in a world of religious and cultural plurality"*

That Christian witness today has to be carried out in a world of religious and cultural plurality is such a compelling reality that no more elaboration is really needed. Faced with such a reality, thoughtful Christians obviously have constantly to struggle to try to be faithful and truthful to their witness and be

open to genuine dialogues with people of other faiths at the same time.

The reality of religious and cultural plurality in the modern world has been given a new perspective since the appearance of the controversial article, "The Clash of Civilizations," by Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University in summer 1993. Huntington's hypothesis is:

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural....The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.... Conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world.

According to Huntington, the major world civilizations are: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African. I have found Huntington's classification of world civilizations rather disturbing for at least two reasons.

- a. In Huntington's thinking and terminology the word "Western" seems to be a synonym of "Christian." As such, the "West" means the "Christian" West, which seems to Huntington to be representative of the *whole* of Christianity. The "clash" between Islam and the West thus becomes a "clash" between Islam and Christianity. This clearly raises some serious questions. With the disintegration of the old Western "Christendom" in the "post-Christian" era, is the "West" still adequate to represent the *whole* of Christianity? Even granted that such representation is appropriate, what image will Christianity give to the rest of the non-Christian world? Will it not further confirm their suspicion and prejudice that Christianity is *still* very much a *Western* entity rather



than a cross-cultural and ecumenical community?

- b. Huntington's classification of world civilizations has also created a serious "identity" crisis for many Christian communities in the non-Western world, especially in Asia. *Religiously* speaking, where, for example, do the Chinese, Indian and Indonesian Christians belong? The Chinese Christians obviously cannot belong to the Confucian civilization, although they can identify themselves with certain Confucian thinking and values. Even more problematic is the case with the Indian and Indonesian Christians, since the Islamic and the Hindu civilizations, unlike the Confucian civilization, are *religiously* based.

Huntington has expanded on his 1993 article in a 1996 book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Henry A. Kissinger thinks that the book "presents a challenging framework for understanding the realities of global politics in the next century.... [It] is one of the most important books to have emerged since the end of the Cold War."

#### *The issue on "human rights"*

For many years now the issue of human rights has been a major concern of the LWF. In recent years the issue has been particularly controversial and sensitive in China's relation with the West, especially with the United States. It has also been very thorny and touchy in the Sino-British relation over Hong Kong. As such, the issue has to be handled with great care and sensitivity in this Assembly in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The issue becomes the more complicated and problematic because it seems to have acquired certain Western

overtones. And, the perceived Western preoccupation with the issue has undoubtedly jeopardized the *universal* nature of its principle as well as the validity of its application. Moreover, the human rights record of the West, both historically and morally speaking, has not been too impressive either. Neither have its standard and practice been very consistent.

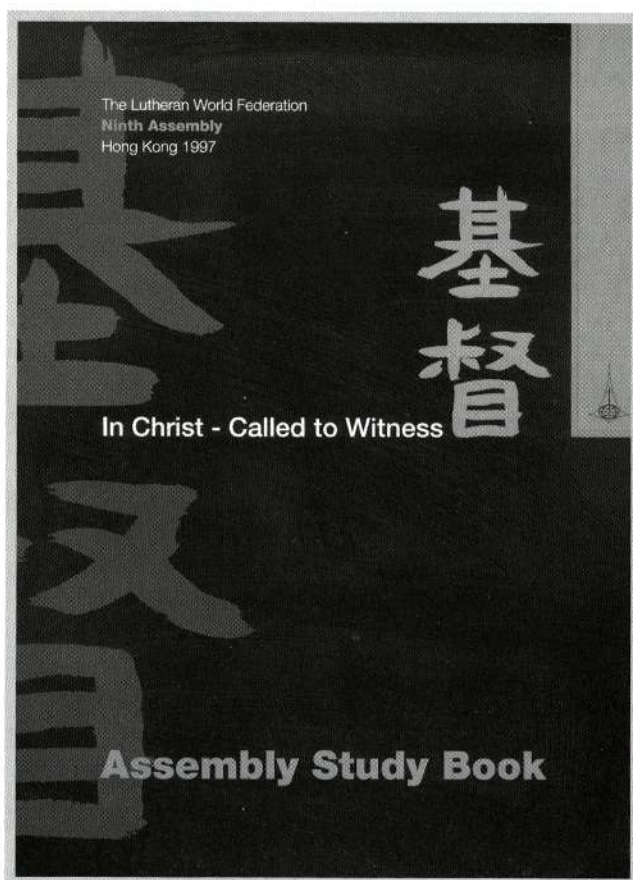
Why should we, Christians in general and Lutherans in particular, be concerned with the human rights issue? Is there a strong *theological* basis and justification for it? The answer is clearly affirmative — unless we have forgotten what we are and what we ought to be. The human rights issue is and should be a Christian concern because it is, first and foremost, God's concern. It is God the Creator who has made us in his own image, with all the freedom, dignity and worth that are inherent in it, otherwise, the phrase "image of God" (*imago Dei*) is meaningless. We humans are not only God's image-bearers, we are also called to be witnesses as well as defenders of that image. That is why the LWF has made the promotion of human rights part of its ministry. We are concerned for human rights, but not because it is high there on the agenda of certain political powers. And, when we do speak out on the issue, let us make sure that our advocacy does not become a mere echo of the media, whether Western or Eastern.

In fact, we are bound to lose our credibility as independent, faithful and courageous witnesses to Christ who is the truth once we jump on the bandwagon of any self-seeking and self-serving power block. Our concern for human rights is undoubtedly biblical and noble. Let our commitment be firm, our judgment be sound and our voice be loud and clear. In order to do that we

must never allow ourselves, whether as a world body, a member church, or an individual, to be politicized and manipulated. Ultimately, the issue is also one of identity and witness.

Socio-politically there is always a limit to what we can and should do. And although our witness and struggle are in this world, our task is not just

mundane but supra mundane as well, "for we are not contending against flesh and blood [only], but [also] against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). [The words "only" and "also" in brackets are mine.]





## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES: A VOICE FROM THE NORTH

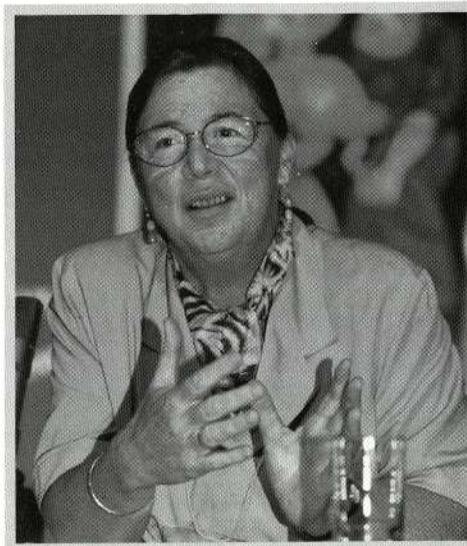
*WHEN TRUTH HAS LOST  
RELEVANCE  
AND HOPE IS CONFUSED*

*Sigrun Møgedal*

I stand here as a voice from a part of the world that for centuries has seen itself as particularly enlightened, with a sacred responsibility to conquer cultures and take charge of world affairs.

A region that heard the call to mission in a fresh way some 150 years ago and sent disciples all over the inhabited world to proclaim the good news. The region that gave home to the Reformation — and where East meets West. Where the three large traditional church families — the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant — have an equally strong presence, yet with a different distribution among nationalities and ethnic groups. A region with Lutherans in diversity as majority and minority in state churches, folk churches, independent churches and movements.

My region has given rise to two world wars in this century. It was temporarily torn apart in two blocks but lately somehow united by a realignment of political and economic interests, markets and information systems, yet with new kinds of divisions, inequities and distrusts. Two blocks still remain, although of a different kind, and this time within each nation and within each church: the winners and the losers in an increasingly competitive society, the



*Dr. Sigrun Møgedal  
Medical Doctor and Director of the  
Centre for Partnership and Develop-  
ment in Oslo, Norway*

powerful and the powerless. Coexisting and contradicting forces of new alliances and new marginalization have given rise to a wild mixture of amazing possibilities and incredible cruelty. Almost incomprehensible patterns of unification, side by side with growing nationalism and war.

We do not any longer dare to talk about the big projects or of collective truth. Instead, we nurture personal experience and the right to choose in freedom from any authority or institution. We call it postmodernity but do not quite know what it is. Because everything is supposed to be acceptable, even personal Christian faith, as long as you do not bother anybody else with it, and it is not claimed as the ultimate truth that has relevance for all.

*"In Christ—  
Called to Witness"*

From our region we used to bring self-confidence, impressive words and influence along with our faith. Our chapters in the book of Acts have contributed a lot to church history. Theology and discipline were strong. We produced volumes of texts. We had it all sorted out. Yet, we are not any longer so sure. This time we cannot come to this global assembly with neat and tidy analyses and interpretations and at the same time be honest to ourselves and our context. We are confused. We come here with humility and longing. Our life experiences as Christian communities have been put to the test of fundamental change. Words have become empty and are not followed by action. There is a weariness in our congregations, our worship and our engagement as Christians in society. We offer care without the invitation to belong. We used to be so self-sufficient and are only starting to discover the real meaning of Jesus' turning values upside down, of strength in weakness.

Let me share some notes from a Norwegian pastor<sup>1</sup> working with people in the streets of Oslo. Frustrated, he realized that the church was neither regarded as a trustworthy dialogue partner nor a source of spiritual or existential wisdom for searching people. His encounter with diverse subcultures, addicts and minorities in the streets forced him out in search for his own identity and integrity. He discovered that:

The gospel is actually God-history, the story of what happened when God created, chose a people, became a human being and walked our streets. Our

task, as communicators of the gospel, is to interpret our own experience in the light of this God-history, accepting both the splendor and the brokenness. This unbelievable dichotomy, this terrible dilemma, this inexplicable paradox is one of the most frightening realities in the life of modern man today. We all know what it should have been. And we all experience the frustration of being totally unable to attain the wholeness that we so deeply long for. It is right within this terrible dilemma that God's reconciling love is revealed. To be trapped within our dilemmas gives cause to futility. To see beyond the dilemmas to the reality of reconciliation gives us courage to remain within the dilemmas together with our fellow human beings, knowing that they do not represent a final conflict, since they are overcome by the power of God's reconciling and never failing love.

We never get there by reason or by convincing arguments but only by being honest with the truth about ourselves and discovering the truth about God, by being in Christ, together with others whose lives are broken, reaching out for fellowship to overcome self-hatred and feelings of worthlessness and, in the words of the minister in the street, "in sharing the horror of knowing that any human being, turned inwards on itself, can become a violent abuser of others." Being in Christ means reminding each other that this is not the final truth

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, Rev. Hans Olav Mørk, Norwegian Church City Mission, Oslo, Norway, 1997.



about our lives. There is a foundation of hope in the creative, redeeming and renewing work of the Triune God. And it is to that hope we are called to witness.

In times such as these, it is striking how the strong testimonies of hope come from situations of crisis, from poverty and marginalization, from communities in the middle of struggle and despair that can witness to a costly hope, a confronting hope a reconciling hope and an embracing hope — in Christ. It is equally striking that dominant cultures, cultures of power and hierarchies, have come to realize that hope rests in power given up, in silence and letting go, rather than in competitive influence.

The eastern European churches, during many years of oppression, have had to learn this the hard way. Even so, in the restlessness of the new embrace between East and West, we have not yet come to grips with what that chapter in the Book of Acts can contribute to our new shared life and witness — together. Neither have we in this new context paused to rediscover the miracle of faith, awakened and sustained through the presence of the folk churches — open and vulnerable to repeated encounters of gospel with culture, yet representing a sacred space in local neighborhoods where people take refuge and feel safe when things fall apart.

It is through sharing glimpses of found identity in Christ that the God-history — creation and fall, reconciliation and renewal — meets with and illuminates our own lives. It is through life in community that we now find the signs of hope and discover that the

power of the kingdom of God is different from the power of the market, the power of rationality and the power of information. It is the hope flowing from a different source of power that carries a witness which is authentic and credible — the power of spirituality; the power of shared pain and shared hope; the power of presence, dialogue and trust; even the power of silence.

At the recent Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Salvador, Brazil, the Indian Orthodox Bishop K.M. George<sup>2</sup> suggested in this context that “silence” could be a metaphor for mission: “Silence is not mutism or passivity. It is the storing up of energy by stopping the violence of words, thoughts and actions. Gandhi effectively used this silence against the specter of violence engendered by colonial rule. If Christianity has used its mission to violate the will of God for the creation, if the Bible has been used as a weapon to violate the Word of God’s love for all nations, then it is time for depoisoning time and space.” This is the kind of corrective voice we need from the people of God.

We come here realizing that we need help from each other to rediscover our identity in Christ and what it means to be called to witness — today. Together with the cloud of witnesses, before us and here with us, within and outside our Lutheran family, we can share together with fresh eyes and minds, with new curiosity and with a new sense of urgency, and be bold in our witness. We need help from those churches that have the first chapters of their book of Acts fresh in their experi-

<sup>2</sup> K.M. George, Theme Panel 1, The Bible in Context: An Indian Story. Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 24 Nov. – 3 Dec. 1996.

ence. We need help to un-package a gospel that through our exclusive ownership and stewardship has been made stale and static, so that it is not coming alive, is not released to reveal its inherent relevance and truth. We need each other to redirect our search away from a focus on perceived truth *within us* to the one revealed truth and hope *among us*, "in Christ."

The issues outlined for this Assembly indicate the scope and the magnitude of the challenge ahead of us. The church cannot be confined to a spiritual corner in the global supermarket. It needs to be true to the gospel values and be bold and speak out against forces that

deny justice, violate creation and deny human identity, integrity and worth. But this can only be an authentic witness if it is carried by a faith community living in Christ, vulnerable yet empowered and nurtured by the hope that is found in the strength of Christ revealed through our weakness.

In a region where truth has lost relevance and where hope is confused, we need the body of Christ, the Lutheran family and the broader communio to rediscover what it means to be in Christ and be called to faithful witness — each in our separate places as well as together — that we all and the world may truly believe.



## A VOICE FROM THE SOUTH: NAMIBIA

*Nickey Lazarus //Gaseb*

God created Africa as he created the rest of the world with its continents. God's son Jesus Christ was, as a baby, a refugee on the continent of Africa. Africans did not hear for the first time about God from Westerners, that is from missionaries from Europe and North America. If one listens carefully and gets to understand the Africans' understanding of life and death, their naming of children and their dealing with land and property, one realizes that Africans were believers in God from the very beginning. They did not read about God in books, but one could say they read about him in the lives of people. Therefore, their own fellow human beings proclaimed the existence of God through their deeds. A person experienced the faithfulness of God in the life and deeds of another human being. It was believed that it was he who fed the orphans, made the sun rise every morning, and the moon at night. It was also the traditional belief of the people that God knew everything. The Rev. Zephania Kameeta points out that the African village was truly a fellowship of all people living in it.

What is it really to be a witness in Christ? What is expected from a person as a witness? A witness does have something not known or understood by those who will receive the message. One points away from himself towards God. Christian witness is not only spoken but is lived out as well. It is a witness telling about the faithfulness of God. It tells about the goodness of Christ and what he does for us. Christian witness



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Namibia*

can only be given and lived out by those in Christ.

What does the Assembly theme, "In Christ — Called to Witness," mean to an African youth today?

The youth today are very outspoken and like to express their views openly. Christian youth, therefore, through their way of living which is an expression of their faith, are witnesses for God. While all established norms of the day were challenged in the past by the youth, it is even more so today. There is a trend today that the youth are not merely satisfied with "formal" religion but are looking for real experience with the Great One. That craving and search for the real thing in itself is a testimony of the Spirit of God leading his people.

The views of the current youth differ from that of their predecessors in that they understand better, maybe, the

nature of God and therefore are of the opinion that God should be praised in the biblical sense, with tambourine, cymbals, string instruments, etc. Another way of praising God is now coming back again — dancing (as mentioned in the Psalms).

The witness is mainly given by means of seminars, youth camps and their own dedication. They would not consciously go out to evangelize, but being a member of a certain youth group, signaling and living and sharing the good news, actually spreads the message and attracts others to join in the activities. They invite their peers to accompany them to youth rallies and camps where the gospel is preached. The most popular form in which the youth relate to God is via praise and worship. A new culture is developing whereby more and more youth are engaged in religious activities, prayer meetings and worship fellowship than in the past.

Do we live up to the ideal? Yes and no!

It is not easy for the young Lutheran constituency in Africa to be a genuine witness in Christ today. As noted in one of the Bible studies dealing with the Assembly theme in an African context, the youth are heavily involved in a race, together with many others. It is a journey of faith set before them, and by which on completion one joins the "cloud of witnesses," who encourage those still running the race by testifying to the faithfulness of God in carrying them through (LWF Ninth Assembly *Bible Studies*, pp. 45-46). Some will not reach the end mark. Others will finish the race with much difficulty. There are weights clinging heavily to our shoulders and pulling us back. I am of the opinion that the biggest portion of the participants in the race consists of

young, not much-experienced Christians, and for them the weight is extra heavy. By weight, I do not necessarily mean sin in the life of the youth, but I refer to the problems encountered by many Africans in most African countries. I refer to these problems that severely affect the lives of young people, obviously the majority of the world's population.

We are "called to witness in Christ" as young people amidst the prevailing social evils. We are "called to witness" amidst civil wars (e.g. Angola), the rising global unemployment problem, lack of access to education and other social services, the threatening AIDS dilemma, dictatorship (where people are denied their basic human rights), increasing crime rate (still the order of the day), poverty, genocide (the Great Lakes dilemma), the identity crisis and, in some cases, the inherited or given church traditions which do not keep pace with the changing world. These traditions are experienced as stiff and rigid by the youth.

How will the youth be meaningful witnesses under these circumstances?

Many young people are leaving the Lutheran church, attracted by the growing charismatic churches. The main cause for this youth exodus are the old church traditions. They would leave a church which is "boring" for one where the Lord can be magnified without reservation and the traditional reverence. The youth are excluded from all facets of the given church tradition. The youth are merely looked upon as a passive church for tomorrow in the congregations and not as equal partners in proclaiming the word of God today.

It is, indeed, not easy to be Christ's witness today, and to be called as a witness in Christ is the greatest challenge of all. It is all-inclusive in the sense that one



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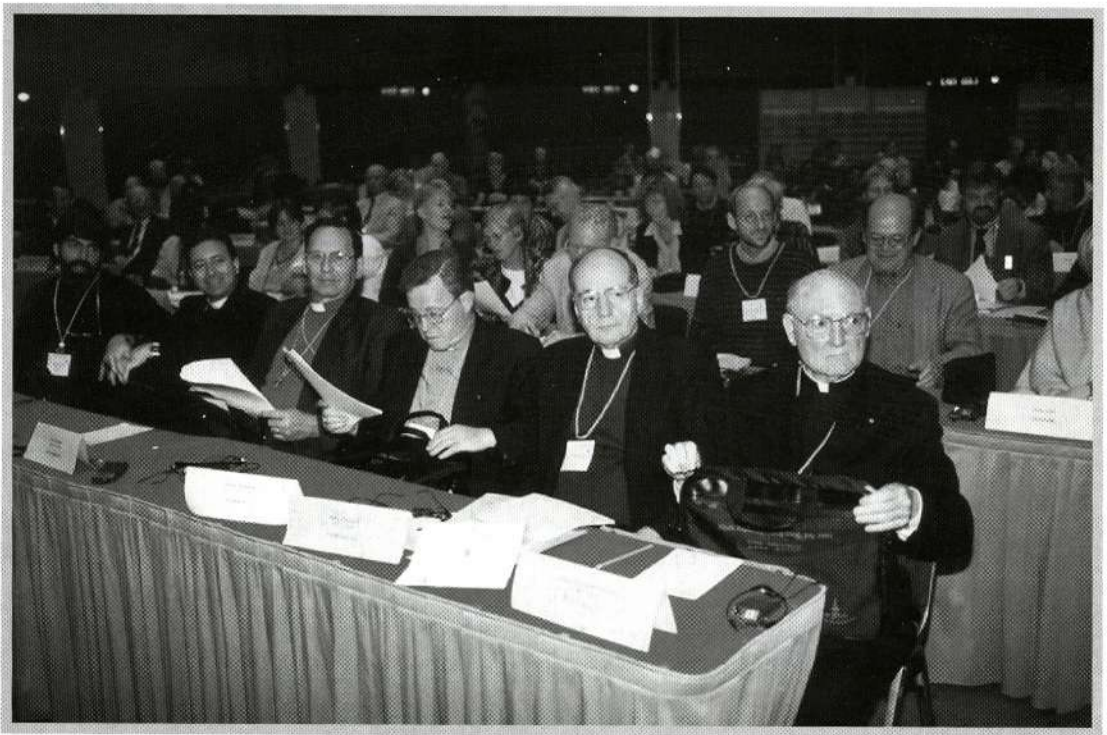
must be a truly faithful believer in order to be a witness to his faithfulness. In Christ we are justified in this life on earth, and in heaven. Life as the communion of saints and the "cloud of witnesses" will be a reality only when all members of the community enjoy equal dignity and equal rights in church and society. Ethnic and cultural diversity must not hinder attempts to fruitful witness in Christ.

There are different ways to look at the future of the youth. Looking through dark lenses the focus will be on tension and complexity; looking through clear lenses the focus will be on hope and opportunity. In many situations, the youth are extraordinarily

blessed with quality leadership assisted by a loyal parental corps and a nucleus of willing members. Thus, they have the potential towards constructive witness in church and society. It takes hard work and dedication. This potential can only be utilized correctly if the youth take the initiative. Let the youth stand firm in deeds and spirit, together with the church leaders both female and male. Let the youth keep their heads high and trust God.

God created us in a particular context, with a particular culture and tradition, and in Christ we are called to witness as equal partners with the old, female and male, in Africa and in the whole world.

THE LUTHERAN COMMUNION  
WITNESSING TO CHRISTIAN UNITY:  
JOINT DECLARATION  
ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION





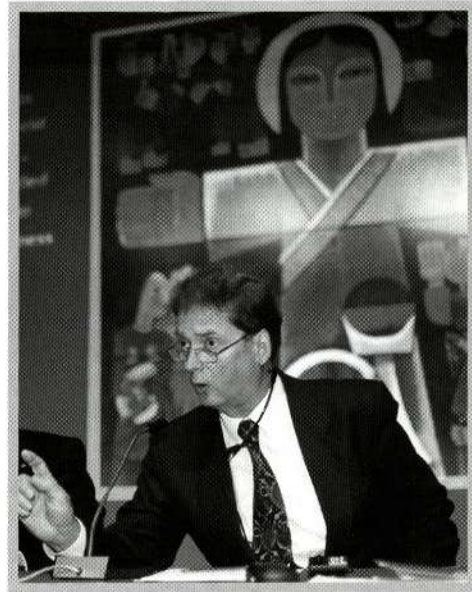
## JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE ALONE

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

*Christoph Stier*

The LWF has adopted a constitution which summons it to be a worldwide communion of churches and commits it to strive for Christian unity. The article on the nature and functions of the LWF states that it "confesses the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity" (Article III). This endeavor relates to all areas of the church's life, to theology and doctrine, worship and spirituality, proclamation and service. All ecumenical initiatives fit into this overall concern. The guiding image here for the unity of Christendom is not uniformity in doctrine and life but a unity that agrees on basic truths while being able to recognize and tolerate differences in reconciled diversity. Yesterday we had a presentation of the ecumenical activities of the LWF in all their diversity. Today my task is to give you a general overview of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD).

On February 27th this year, the general secretary, Dr. Noko, sent out the final proposal for a Joint Declaration to all the LWF member churches and national committees with an accompanying letter. This proposal is the outcome of a process of consultation with the churches over a number of years. It has been drawn up in numerous individual steps under the auspices



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gelical Lutheran Church of  
Mecklenburg, Germany*

of the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Now the member churches of the LWF have been requested to take an official stand on the document through their highest authorities. The Roman Catholic Church, for its part, will also be making a binding pronouncement on the Joint Declaration.

Up to its session in September 1996 the Council of the LWF had been hoping the churches would be able to consent and take a final vote on it before this anniversary Assembly. Then the consensus ascertained in the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Assembly could have been solemnly affirmed and celebrated in worship here. This aim seemed to be almost within reach. But the timetable proved unrealistic. However desirable and welcome such an



event and occasion as this Assembly might have been, it is more important for the churches to have sufficient time to reach a well founded and theologically responsible conclusion.

Under the heading "The Common Understanding of Justification", paragraph 15 of the Joint Declaration, summarizes in a few sentences the decisive biblically grounded statements of the message of justification. "In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. ... Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works." And paragraph 17 states, "We also share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God's saving action in Christ: it tells us that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way." Such sentences can be considered the heart of the Joint Declaration. They reflect the "consensus on basic truths" that has now been reached and in whose light the remaining differences are tolerable (cf. paragraphs 5, 13, 40).

In order to evaluate the Joint Declaration it is important to distinguish between the biblical message of justification and the church's doctrine of justification. The message of justification is prior and unshakeable, given in the revelation of the triune God in Jesus Christ. Every doctrine of justification finds its basis and norm in the witness of Holy Scripture. The message of the justification of the sinner by grace alone for the sake of Christ is to be believed

and proclaimed. Its purpose is to comfort and heal. It wants to liberate people from fears and constraints, to save them from sin and death. It can be relied upon in life and death. That is the goal at which it is really aiming.

In reference to the penitential Psalm 130, in 1524 Martin Luther wrote the hymn, "Out of the depths I cry to thee; Lord, hear me, I implore thee". It contains the words, "Thy pardon, Lord, is gained through grace: it can alone avail us. Our works can ne'er our guilt efface, the strictest life must fail us. Before thee none can boast of aught; to fear thee we are rightly taught, on grace alone depending. My hope is, therefore, in the Lord, and not in mine own merit; I rest upon his faithful word to them of contrite spirit; that he is merciful and just, this is my comfort and my trust: I wait for him in patience."

The message of justification is to be accepted with a penitent and grateful heart and then to be spread out before God in prayer and hymns of praise. And yet the church also needs the doctrine of justification. In the language of theological reflection and in precise terms this doctrine summarizes what should be taught about justification and sanctification, sin and salvation. At the same time it draws the line against misunderstandings and false teachings. The doctrine of justification has special significance for the church. It is the criterion for measuring and judging every ecclesiastical doctrine. It reflects on the center of the Christian faith. It penetrates to the root from which all Christian life and every Christian doctrine worthy of the name spring. In a disputation Martin Luther once summarized it in the following words: "The article about justification is the master and prince, lord, ruler and judge over all types of doctrine. It preserves and



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guides all the church's teaching and restores our consciences before God" (WA 39, I, 205).

In the Reformation period the doctrine of justification constituted the key theological issue in the disagreements within the church. The conflict over this point finally led to the division of the Western church. From Europe this division has spread to all the continents on this earth. The division was sealed by the confessional documents of the Reformation churches and of the Council of Trent for the Roman Catholic Church. The divisive consequences of the doctrinal rejections and condemnations expressed there still have an effect today.

It was only in connection with the ecumenical movement during this century that attention was again directed seriously to the aim of surmounting this division within the church. Since its foundation the LWF has been committed to promoting this movement. With the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and above all in the decree on ecumenism, the Roman Catholic Church in turn established a new relationship to the other churches. After more than 400 years the way was open for participation in officially agreed dialogues on the world level. The LWF and the Roman Catholic Church appointed commissions which worked on controversial theological issues. In the meantime, more than 30 years have passed. Important documents have been produced. They set out the rapprochement and common insights achieved by these dialogues, as well as the differences and antagonisms. But so far these documents have not been officially received and affirmed by the churches. However, the time has surely long since come to harvest the fruits of these dialogues and — even if only in one realm

initially — to make doctrinally binding statements which can contribute to overcoming the division between the churches. On the doctrine of justification, according to the unanimous result of the dialogues, despite the remaining differences there are now no disagreements which constitute grounds for doctrinal condemnations or must divide the churches.

In addition to the dialogues on the world level, there have been and are official conversations on national and regional levels between Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Two of these are of special significance for the Joint Declaration.

In Germany in 1980, a far reaching process was launched there in the form of the extensive project "The Condemnations of the Reformation Era — Do They Still Divide?" In addition to the Lutheran churches, the United and Reformed churches also participated. The final document (1985) contains detailed treatment of the doctrine of justification, the sacraments and the ministry. Theological commissions thoroughly examined this document between 1986 and 1991. In 1994 the church authorities and synods of the Protestant churches in Germany adopted identical resolutions on it. So official decisions have already been taken in the German (Protestant) churches on the central elements of the doctrine of justification with which the Joint Declaration also deals. They have been forwarded to Rome with the request for a response. No final answer has come from there as yet.

In the United States of America, Lutherans and Catholics conducted their own detailed dialogue on justification. Both sides have reached an extensive agreement: in 1985 the study "Justification by Faith" was published. The agreement on the understanding of jus-



tification reached in this study was officially confirmed by the Council of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America in 1991. The National Committee in the USA informed the LWF in 1993 that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had the intention of taking steps to prepare a declaration that the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century on the doctrine of justification do not apply to their partner today. It asked the LWF for advice and cooperation in this procedure.

Thus it was high time for the LWF to take common action. At the meeting of the Council in 1993 at Kristiansand in Norway, the first agreements on this were reached and initial decisions taken. It seemed possible to proceed together on two conditions. Firstly, the question of mutual doctrinal condemnations had to be restricted to the doctrine of justification. Secondly, it was necessary to involve all the member churches of the LWF and to give them the opportunity to participate in this project. Limiting the issue, on the one hand, was balanced by the worldwide breadth on the other.

Various bits of preparatory work were combined in the first draft of the Joint Declaration. The general secretary sent this version dated 30 January 1995 to the member churches, requesting them to send in their reactions by the beginning of 1996. At this stage 39 churches responded. They represented about 75 percent of the Lutherans who make up the LWF. The responses mainly expressed agreement in principle but also contained critical questions and concrete proposals on the wording, and in a few cases they were negative. The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg carefully compiled all these responses, analyzing them in detail and taking each of the reactions into account. This extensive documentation

together with the response from the Roman Catholic Church formed the basis for thoroughly revising the first draft and drawing up a second proposal for a Joint Declaration. The task was entrusted to a group of experts and representatives from both sides who met in June 1996 at Würzburg in Germany.

This second proposal was submitted to the Council of the LWF for discussion at its meeting at the end of September 1996. The Council confirmed that it constituted a suitable basis for further work. It resolved that the document should again be revised to a limited extent. At the same time the Council decided to allow the churches more time for the reception process. The Lutheran/Catholic group of experts met again in January of this year at Würzburg and revised the document. At its February meeting the Executive Committee received this version. It adopted it as the final proposal. After the necessary consultation with Rome, the general secretary then forwarded this final proposal to the member churches. Now they have been requested to take the appropriate decisions by 1 May 1998.

The question which the churches have to answer is whether they can affirm the results set out in paragraphs 40 and 41. All the other sections of the Joint Declaration lead up to these conclusions. It is about them that we must decide.

The special thing about the Joint Declaration is that it expresses the consensus on the understanding of justification in a shared but differentiated language. Following the statements made together, the Catholics and the Lutherans each set out what is specific to them. However, this does not cancel out what they have in common. Nor does it exclude either Lutherans or Catholics



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from voicing significant objections to this or that formulation of the others' doctrine in the Joint Declaration. So the decisive question is whether objections of this kind constitute judgments that must still have the effect of dividing the churches. The Joint Declaration claims that this is not the case.

The Declaration and the reception process it has set in motion provide the Lutheran churches — wherever possible jointly with other churches in their particular region and in consultation with them — with a good possibility of giving central consideration to the message and doctrine of justification. Church authorities, synods, training institutions and local congregations are called upon to deal with it. Thus the project of the Joint Declaration can also help towards a stock-taking within the Lutheran and Reformation churches on this central doctrine by which the church stands or falls.

In the process nobody can overlook the fact that there are differences among the member churches of the LWF relating to their historical development, theological traditions, expressions of spirituality and particular concrete situations, including their local ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church. Representatives of churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America, in particular, have pointed out in discussions that other emphases have priority on their agenda, for example the issues of reconciliation, mission and relations with other religions. Here and there one even finds bewilderment that anyone should invest so much time and energy in controversial questions that have hopefully been overcome by now. There is the further difficulty that a number of member churches will probably never have the Joint Declaration available in their own language. There-

fore it is all the more important within the overall communion of the Lutheran churches to take one another seriously and support one another.

What then is the purpose of the Joint Declaration? What is it possible to achieve? If the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church consent to it in principle, it will constitute a binding confirmation that the doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation era do not apply to our contemporary partners. This declaration will not abolish the divisions between the churches. But, nevertheless, the acceptance of the Joint Declaration that we hope to witness will prove to be an important event for church history and ecumenism. Basic agreement on the doctrine of justification can provide a basis for new mutual relationships. These relationships will be set on a firm foundation by the consent of the competent church authorities. To put it figuratively: a large, previously insurmountable stone which has blocked the way to unity for such a long time will be moved aside. This makes the common effort worth while. In the future no one will be able to argue that we can make no progress along the path to communion between the churches because this obstacle is blocking the way. And then further steps can and must be taken along this path. Many people in our churches are waiting impatiently for this to happen. Paragraph 43 of the Joint Declaration lists questions which need to be discussed urgently. The ecumenical communion in witness and service, which is already a living reality locally, needs strengthening.

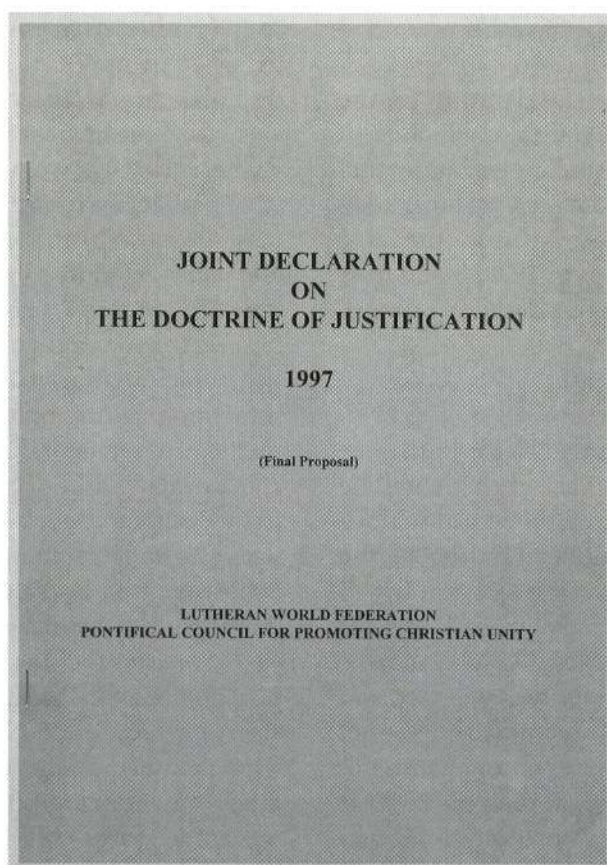
A qualitatively new start can be made in the relationships between the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church. On the doctrine of justification — the nourishing ground of

ecclesiastical doctrine and at the same time the theological core of division — a consensus has been formulated which now makes it possible mutually to bear the remaining differences concerning the doctrine of justification. They can no longer constitute grounds for church divisions. In other words, the Joint Declaration attempts to lay bare reliable, firm ground again. Further common points can be built on this foundation.

In paragraphs 40 and 41 the results stated by the Joint Declaration are: "The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration,

and emphasis in the understanding of justification described ... are acceptable. ... Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration."

Now the task facing our churches is to examine carefully and critically, in responsibility before God, without prejudice and without reservations, whether this really is the case. I would ask you to make sure that your church does so.





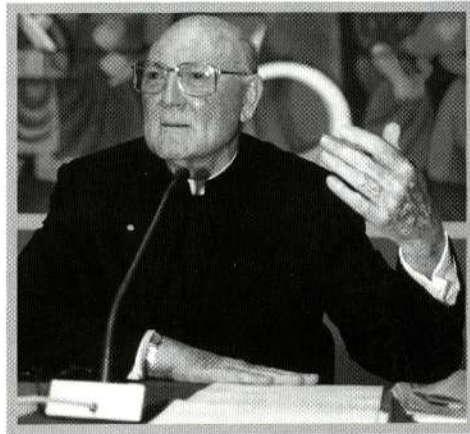
## PASTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

*Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy*

It is indeed a joy for me to be with you at this Ninth General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation. All the more so because we are able to reflect today on an ecumenical development of enormous proportions. Namely, the fact that at this time in history, in these remaining years of the twentieth century, we are on the verge of a very positive achievement which is historic because it aims at settling a fundamental issue on which we have been divided since the sixteenth century. I speak of course of the joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification to which both of our communities are giving formal consideration, and which we both hope will receive a positive response in a short time, perhaps in 1998, but at least before the end of this decade.

### *The significance of our achievement*

How significant it will be for Lutherans and Roman Catholics when we will be able to affirm before the world that we share the same understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. It will mean first of all, and above all, that we will have honored Jesus Christ, the one Mediator and Saviour between God and humanity, the Redeemer, the special anniversary of whose coming stands immediately before us at the year 2000. It will mean that in a profound way, in regard to this central issue, we will have



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Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican*

linked ourselves to, indeed entered with Christ into, the very prayer he uttered to his Father, as St John's Gospel tells us, when he prayed for the unity of his disciples. His prayer for his disciples was based on his relationship with his Father: "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us (Jn 17:21). In all efforts to promote Christian unity we strive to enter in Christ's prayer to his Father, for the unity of his disciples.

Achieving our goal will also mean something significant for the whole ecumenical movement. If we, Lutherans and Roman Catholics are able to confess together to the world, that we have the same understanding of the doctrine of Justification by Faith and therefore that the mutual condemnations we leveled at one another in the sixteenth century do not apply today, would this not also be a great encouragement for the whole ecumenical movement? Since the disagreement over justification by faith was at the heart of Martin Luther's conflict with church authorities in the six-

teenth century, will it not be an enormous encouragement to the search for Christian unity, if by the end of this twentieth century we Lutherans and Roman Catholics are able to claim consensus on that doctrine? Will it not give a renewed context of hope as the search for unity continues in the twenty-first century, the beginning of a new Christian millennium? I personally am convinced that it will.

### *The continuing challenge that we face*

At the same time, one must recall that our achievement on the doctrine of Justification by Faith does not stand alone. It must not be underestimated. Nor should it be overestimated. It is indeed part of a broader process, a continuing challenge that we face, in the search for reconciliation and unity between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

The heritage of separation and alienation between our communities, coming to us from the sixteenth century, is unfortunately complex. It touches on other vital concerns which we must also continue to address on our way towards reconciliation. Nor are these concerns simply of human origin. They relate, rather, to the will of Christ himself. A central matter among these would be the nature and mission of the Church founded by Christ. This issue itself touches on many other areas which our dialogues on the international and national levels have already begun to address. These include for example, our understanding of the relationship of scripture and tradition, and the question of the ministry. On some of these issues our dialogue has already found significant convergences. And we can hope for further advance as the dialogue continues. But we need to approach this process with a patience marked with

love for Jesus Christ and for one another, as we search to resolve the differences that still exist, in our search for visible unity between us.

The process in which we are engaged challenges us in many ways: to resolve remaining theological problems through dialogue; to heal bitter memories that have come down to us over the centuries in order to look at one another in a new light; to find ways to enter into one another's life, to the extent that we can do so now, so that we can increasingly give witness to the gospel, without the hindrance of the scandal of division. But what we are achieving by our agreement on the doctrine of Justification by Faith occupies an essential role in that process.

### *Growing together in Christ*

What has been achieved in dialogue regarding Justification by Faith, the theological insights formulated in a way to enable us to claim to have reached a consensus in faith, must be brought into the heart of our churches, into the very life of our congregations and parishes. These insights need to foster renewal in the minds and hearts of our people, conversion in our attitudes toward one another. I therefore suggest some pastoral steps that can be taken, to help us now grow closer together in Christ.

It needs to be said, first of all, that the pastoral reception that challenges us at this moment must be rooted in the ongoing conviction that the quest for Christian unity is something that should permeate the life of our churches. In no. 20 of his encyclical *Ut unum sint*, on commitment to ecumenism, Pope John Paul II says this:

... it is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian Unity, is not just some sort of "appendix" which is added to the



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Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature.

It is in this spirit that pastoral steps should be taken relating to our joint declaration. Perhaps these are already underway. But let me suggest some that I believe would be useful.

1. *Bible study programs.* Our reflection on the Joint Declaration could be related to biblical reflection. The materials already developed jointly by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity connected to the report of the third phase of international dialogue, entitled "Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith," could be very useful, especially now. They could encourage reflection on key themes relating to our common vision on Justification by Faith in the framework of reflecting on significant texts in the scriptures.
2. *Christian Education Programs.* Ways could be found to incorporate the results of our Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue on Justification by Faith into programs on Christian education for both clergy and laity, by including them, for example, in courses in continuing education for clergy and laity sponsored by local diocese or synod, or with specific educational programs organized by parishes and congregations.

This might be done by each of us separately in our own continuing educational programs. But could we not look for ways to develop some

programs together? Perhaps local Lutheran and Catholic congregations in a given neighborhood could organize together a set of lectures on this theme. Courses in seminaries, colleges and universities under our respective auspices will hopefully incorporate these issues into their curriculum.

3. This raises the related question of *ecumenical formation*. We are deeply aware of the need of continually giving attention to the ecumenical formation of our clergy and laity. One cannot expect that our people will understand that ecumenism is an organic part of the church's life and work unless our churches are continually finding ways to educate and shape the attitudes of the people about the meaning and significance of ecumenism. But especially now, when we are on the verge of a significant breakthrough in Lutheran-Catholic relations, we need to provide information and interpretation about the theological convergences and consensus coming about through our dialogue, so that these can be properly discussed and eventually received by the churches.
4. An important resource is *preaching*. In the Sunday liturgy the people gather to hear the Word of God. It is a great opportunity for the clergy, when preaching on the saving work of Christ seen in the scriptures, to illustrate that in our achievement of reconciliation with one another, we identify ourselves specifically with Our Lord and Savior's work of bringing reconciliation between God and humanity. The one in the pulpit has an opportunity to show the relationship between unity and mission, between the unity of Christians and the mission of the

Church. When Christians are divided from one another, the mission of the Church suffers. The preacher can remind the congregation of Our Lord's prayer to his Father for his disciples: "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

5. *Prayer for unity* is always important. It is important, especially now that we promote prayer for unity both, within our respective churches, and together ecumenically, first of all in thanksgiving for what God has allowed us to achieve, and then in the hope that further progress can be made.

The speak of prayer for unity is also to remind ourselves of the primacy of spiritual ecumenism. The *Decree on Ecumenism* (N.8) affirms that "this change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called 'spiritual ecumenism.'" I do not hesitate to say that unless our ecumenical efforts are built on a deep spiritual foundation, nourished by prayer in which we beg together for God's help, and for the grace of repenting of our divisions, we cannot make progress.

6. Finally, let us be *creative and practical*. We know that there are already a variety of creative programs in which, as a result of the progress of our dialogue, Lutherans and Catholics have begun to give common witness in ways not seen just a few years ago, and which could inspire us. For example, in various places there are covenant relationships between Roman Catholic dioceses and Lutheran synods, or between

Catholic parishes and Lutheran congregations in the same neighborhood. In a recent trip to Chicago I discovered that, following the covenant created there between the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Lutheran Synod, the teachers and pupils of a Roman Catholic grammar school and of a Lutheran school created a covenant between them, pledging cooperation and understanding. They have cooperated to produce at least two collections of prayers: *Devotions for Advent: A Chain of Prayer Linking the two Communities*, and also a Lenten booklet, *Prayers of the Forty Days*. Thus they share their personal prayer during important liturgical seasons. They also pledge to work together for the common good, plan for joint programs and activities that assist faculty and students in moving toward greater unity between their schools, and to pray for each other and for the complete reconciliation of their churches. The two schools have created a way in which to call the attention of the children to the need for Catholics and Lutherans to move toward unity. With a little ingenuity I suspect that many other creative projects could be established with the same goal in mind.

These, then, are six pastoral steps that might be considered.

#### *Patiently working toward our God*

We should be joyful, at this time, for something important is coming about. But we must also be *realistic* and have a *patience rooted in Christ*. For at the same time that we have come to the verge of resolving an issue over which we have been thought to differ for centuries, new differences between us have come



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about. While we have taken a step toward unity, it does not seem that unity is just around the corner. As mentioned before, the dialogue needs to continue even as we celebrate the achievements that have been made.

But this patience that we need is part of our life in Christ. "Love is patient," said St Paul, "it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4,7). We, Lutherans and Catholics, need to measure up to the call of Christ to live in his

love, both when it is easy, and also when our patience is tried.

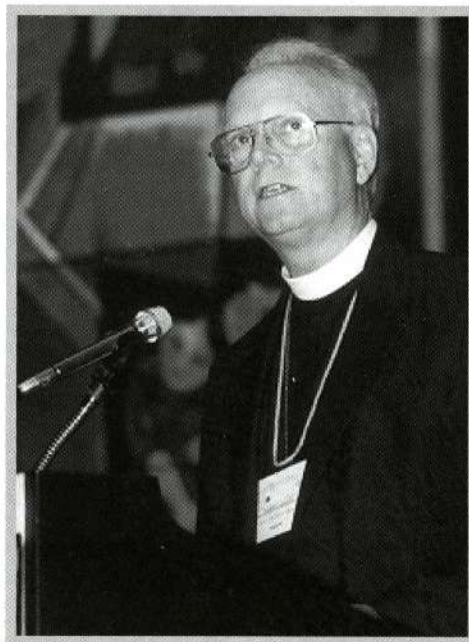
Again, St Paul: "Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:8). I pray that, in our continuing dialogue and efforts to overcome the obstacles that remain so that visible unity can be achieved, we are motivated by the fact that it is the Lord's will to which we are responding, the Lord who has sent his Spirit to guide us into all truth.

## JUSTIFICATION TODAY?

*H. George Anderson*

Lutherans with long memories may smile at this title. At the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki (1963), the theme was also "Justification Today"—without the question mark. In the ten days of that Assembly Lutherans attempted to work out a statement on justification that would address their contemporary situation. But the time proved too short to reach a consensus, and the assembly merely "received" the document rather than adopting it. Although the statement *Justification Today* was published some months later, the effort of thirty-four years ago has never been regarded as fully satisfactory. Therefore, the use of the same title—this time with a question mark—calls up the image of a persistent child asking with impatience, "Is it time now? If not 1963, will it happen today?"

I do not know whether that historic reference was in the minds of the planners who selected this topic. They certainly did not mention it when they outlined the approach I am to take. The task assigned to me is to look at "what the doctrine of justification means for ordinary people in today's world." The assumption behind this assignment—emphasized by the question mark in the title—is that, for many parts of our church, the doctrine of justification may seem distant and irrelevant. It does not appear to address the pressing problems of economic life, political conflict, the encounter with other religions, and social issues within the churches themselves. People may seriously ask, "Why spend time on the questions of another century, when we have so many press-



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ing problems in our own?" What real difference will it make for us whether or not we and the Roman Catholic Church can agree on a statement about a doctrine that is seldom mentioned in any news releases from church body offices around the world? Where does this doctrine fit among the ten issues that shape our discussion groups here in Hong Kong?

Yet for Lutherans, the doctrine of justification has been called, "the main doctrine of Christianity" (Apology I, 2). I see my assignment today as addressing the question, "Is that sweeping statement still true?" Does this historic issue still have the importance that it had four hundred years ago? Does it have this importance for Christians who have grown up in areas where the culture has been non-Christian and where the issues with the dominant culture have little resemblance to the issues that Martin



Luther faced? Does it remain central for Christians who live in post-Christian societies where the questions of human existence are posed without any reference to God at all?

My basic premise is that indeed, the doctrine of justification is precisely the key needed to address the major issues confronting Lutherans around the world. In the conversations with other religions it is justification that sets us apart and therefore provides us with a distinctive witness and gift to bring to our discussion partners from other faiths. In the struggle for justice and human survival, the doctrine of justification gives us both humility and courage. In the work of evangelization the doctrine of justification maintains the distinctive role and place of Jesus Christ as the one mediator between God and all creation. In post-modern societies, as in all situations, it provides the only certainty to individuals who have lost confidence in human promises. To put it most sharply: the contribution that the Lutheran church of this generation can make to the world will stand or fall on its ability to interpret the doctrine of justification in its local contexts. Our efforts to develop a joint declaration with the Roman Catholic Church demonstrates both the risks and the rewards of such a project.

### *The conversation with other religions*

Both religion and politics have forced us to deal with other world religions in the last decades. In an earlier day, Christian mission work often faced tribal cultures that were no match for the technical and economic resources that came with the missionaries. Now we are forced to deal with governments that are powerful, aggressive, and culturally bound to religious traditions that do not recog-

nize Christianity or actively oppose it. In other parts of the world, we are working within cultures that allow a variety of religious expressions but have no interest in supporting any one of them. In still other places, we work within cultures that have lost their power but still maintain symbols and practices that Christians resist and seek to change. In all of these cases we must be able to affirm what is good in the culture around us (Philippians 4:8) and to understand the religious foundations of our society; at the same time, it is absolutely essential that Christians are able to know and articulate what makes us different. It is here that the doctrine of justification offers help.

In the conversation with other religions, Christians can affirm that God is actively engaged in dealing with the fundamental dissonance that human beings experience in relation to each other, to the world around them and to God. God is both interested and involved in the task of reconciliation. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). God thus makes the first move, initiating reconciliation instead of waiting for humankind to satisfy divine standards, win divine favor or find the proper pattern of behavior to avoid suffering. God is neither a dispassionate observer nor a dispassionate judge. God loves the world and has acted on that love.

Of course the Bible has many ways of describing this remarkable action of God: "salvation," "redemption," "reconciliation," "adoption" and many more. Among all the images for God's action in the Bible, however, the courtroom concept of justification most clearly presents God's unexpected and undeserved initiative. It is not human-



kind that attracts God's interest, earns God's favor or finds its way back to God. Humankind stands before God in all its brokenness, and it is precisely there where we have to come to terms with our own faults that we hear surprising declaration of innocence: "... since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:23-24). This radical focus on the action of God in spite of human sin is one of the reasons that justification remains central for any comparative discussions with other religions.

This conviction that God has taken the initiative in addressing human sinfulness is a gift that Christians can offer to inter-faith discussion. It both recognizes the need for change in human life and at the same time asserts that God has already made that change possible. In the words of the Joint Declaration on Justification, "The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ... as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way" (15,17).

One of the most difficult challenges we must face in a situation of religious plurality is how we see ourselves vis-à-vis persons of other religions. The temptation is to consider ourselves superior because, for example, we have the truer religion. This attitude makes dialogue difficult because we believe that we must bring discussion partners to our own state of enlightenment. Instead of dialogue, we end up in "talking down" to others, trying to help them to see things as clearly as we do. If they cannot honestly say that they see things

our way, we wonder what is wrong with their mental capacity.

On the other hand, if we simply feel that all religions are the same, then what is the point of dialogue at all? We might as well use our time in some more productive way, perhaps in planning social projects or working on issues of justice and human rights. If there is no difference among the effects of various religions on human behavior, then what is the purpose of discussing them? How is it possible, then, to speak with conviction and at the same time listen with humility?

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith gives us a firm basis for genuine dialogue. In the first place, it does not enter the Christian into a contest of wits with someone who holds different religious beliefs. We Christians know that it was not personal ability or mental aptitude that brought us to belief in Christ. As Luther reminded us in his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, "... by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, [and] enlightened me with his gifts. . ."

Coming to belief in Jesus Christ is a gift which God bestows, without any special talents or insights from our side. Therefore, in dialogue the Christian is free to speak about faith without assuming that skill in argument is necessary or even appropriate. God works faith when and where God wills. We are "justified by his grace as a gift" (Romans 3:24). This assurance gives us the courage to speak, knowing that, just as we did not come to faith by "talking ourselves into it," so our dialogue partner will not need to be convinced by the power of our argument but only by the power of the Holy Spirit. That process may take a long time. The parable of the



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seeds in Mark (4:3ff.) reminds us that it requires an unspecified germination period before the results of sowing the Word become manifest.

The second way in which the doctrine of justification by grace through faith helps us in dialogue with other religions is that it prevents us from assuming a morally superior position. Often the issues of religious differences arise over specific social problems, such as marriage, the status of women, or burial customs. Christians may oppose certain practices of the dominant culture, and that opposition may lead to intense discussions about which position is the right one. In such circumstances it is natural to argue that our practice is better than the existing one, and from there it is a small step to assume that we are somehow better people because we avoid the offensive practice. This attitude of self-congratulation is very quickly sensed by our dialogue partner, and the dialogue turns into bitter argument. Is there another way by which we can suggest that there is a better alternative without implying that we are better people?

St. Paul begins his description of justification by reminding his readers—who thought they were morally superior to Gentile sinners—that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:24). That is our starting point. We enter dialogue knowing that, from an religious point of view, we are no more righteous than those persons whose practices we are opposing. Furthermore, we need to remember that our own self-interest may be coloring our judgment, so that we don’t see the matter in question with complete objectivity. For example, we may argue for human rights because we happen to agree with the social program of those who are being imprisoned. If the prison-

ers were attacking our own basic beliefs, however, we might be less interested in urging their freedom.

Thus we all stand under judgment. It is from this perspective—under judgment—that we carry on our debates with other religions. Not that we have nothing to say, but that what we say will always be colored by our own sin. If what we say is not persuasive, if it does not change practices, or if it is ignored, we must always ask if the fault is ours for not representing our cause faithfully. Jesus asked his followers, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3) As Lutherans we do not believe that God’s justifying word will prevent us from continuing to sin. We confess that, despite God declaring us righteous for Christ’s sake, we repeatedly turn to false gods. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (I John 1:8). Yet this frank admission of our own fallibility does not immobilize us; it turns us back to the One who alone can be trusted to “judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity” (Psalm 98:9).

The Joint Declaration recognizes this constant need for repentance by saying, “The justified must all through life constantly look to God’s unconditional justifying grace. They are also continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks. . . [and] are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness” (28).

### *In the struggle for justice*

As a postscript to what has just been said about our remaining sinners even though we have been justified, we can add that this insight is a powerful support in the struggle for justice.



Efforts in behalf of other human beings often falter when changes come too slowly or when they fail to have their desired effect. Governments and oppressive factions seem to have an infinite number of ways to delay or subvert justice. Allies in a cause can turn into rivals. Coalitions break down. Colleagues disappoint us. Results do not meet expectations. In such circumstances it is hard to press on and maintain hope.

One of the important effects of our belief in the God who justifies is that we do not place too much confidence in the nobility of the human spirit. We certainly recognize the great capacity for heroism that persons involved in the struggle for justice have demonstrated. But we also understand the deviousness of sin. This realistic view of human nature—even when the humans are fellow-Christians—protects us from false confidence in our actions and in our cause.

To confess that we are both justified and sinners at the same time gives us the courage to examine our own actions without fearing that such honest self-examination will jeopardize our relationship to God. God already has seen our heart. We can therefore search our own lives for the attitudes or actions that may have precipitated difficulties with our colleagues, allies, or opponents. At the same time, we can expect that those colleagues, allies or opponents will also be operating out of motives that are less than perfect. Such knowledge does not lead to despair or inaction. On the contrary, it helps us to understand that there are reasons for the problems that we encounter, despite the nobleness and ultimate rightness of our cause. We are therefore able to address the issues more patiently and persistently, always probing for the points where a change in behavior is needed.

Ultimately the cause of justice is God's cause, and that is our only reason for hope. As Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism, "God's kingdom comes of itself, without our prayer," and we pray that it may also come to us. We pray that God will use our efforts where those efforts are in consonance with God's purpose, and that God will create good out of our efforts when, of themselves, they are imperfect or misguided. After all, if God could bring good for all humankind out of the crucifixion, certainly God can use any other sinful human act for good as well. Thus God not only declares the guilty righteous for Christ's sake, God can also take the work of guilty humans and bring good from it. It is in this hope that we work for justice, laying the results of our struggle in God's creative hands.

### *The unique work of Jesus Christ*

The third way in which the doctrine of justification helps us in the new situation of religious plurality is that it maintains the central role of Jesus Christ.

Christians recognize the importance of Jesus in interfaith dialog. In fact, we often start with the story of Jesus as a way to introduce the heart of our religious tradition. There is even a possible connection with those religions, like Judaism and Islam, that recognize Jesus from their own perspectives. Other religions also can find a place for him as teacher or prophet. In this way Jesus becomes both a starting point and a bridge to other religions.

But Jesus is more than a great teacher or religious genius. The doctrine of justification puts him at the very center of God's reconciling work. "The first and chief article is this," writes Luther in the Smalcald Articles (Pt. II, Art. I, 1 and 2), "that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, 'was put to death for our



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trespasses and raised again for our justification' (Romans 4:25). He alone is 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29)." That is, when God took the initiative to reconcile the world, the mighty work was accomplished through Jesus Christ. Jesus does not merely explain God to us or point us to God. It is "In Christ" that "God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them (2 Cor. 5:19)."

The Joint Declaration affirms this key role by stating: "The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father" (15).

At the end of the Bible the book of Revelation looks beyond a world ravaged by persecution and destruction. Scenes of the utmost carnage and terror on earth are interrupted by glimpses of another realm where the unbroken worship of the Lamb continues in hymn after hymn of praise:

*for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;*

*you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,*

*and they will reign on earth (Rev. 5:9-10).*

Here the doctrinal language of St. Paul is cast into the visual language of the Apocalypse. Again it is Jesus Christ by whom struggling believers are ransomed and made into servants worthy of their God. Again it is only by faith that this truth can be grasped. But there is no doubt that this vision is more real than fears and sufferings: "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). And at the

center of this hope is the figure of Jesus Christ.

### *The assurance of faith*

Because the saving act of God rests on the completed work of Jesus Christ, rather than on our own attitudes or actions, it has a certainty that we cannot find in ourselves. The matter is "out of our hands". It depends solely on the graciousness of God and the faithfulness of Christ himself.

This external certainty is a powerful gift to us in this time of psychologizing and debate about the pliability of the human mind. Pluralism in our culture and the conflict of world views have thrown our traditional landmarks and assumptions into confusion. Our times are not so different from those of Luther, when believers also found it risky to depend on their own sense of security. Luther noted in his lectures on Galatians that, "This is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works, but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive" (WA 40/1:589.25-28; LW 26:387).

In the words of the Joint Declaration: "We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament" (34).

We therefore are freed from worrying about whether we have done enough to please God, or even whether our faith is strong enough. We need only look to the completed work of Christ to know that nothing could pos-



sibly be lacking. As long as we focus our hope on Christ we are safe. Like Peter, we will not sink as long as our eyes are on Christ (Matthew 14:28). It is only when our gaze wanders to the perils around us or to our own abilities that the waters begin to close over our heads.

### *Pastoral consequences*

Because the doctrine of justification became the key issue between Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century, it still has a powerful role in the relationship between our two communions. The anathemas of the 16th century have been the foundation for official opposition to members of the other tradition by some governments. If it now can be established that Lutherans, for example, do not teach what is condemned by the Council of Trent, governments will need to re-think their position vis-a-vis Lutheran minorities. And the same change should occur where Lutheran theology shapes government policy. In other words, the Joint Declaration on Justification should help to improve the political situation of oppressed minorities, whether Lutheran or Roman Catholic.

Furthermore, the Joint Declaration on Justification will help to remove stereotypes that have been created by centuries of controversy. There are still significant differences that separate us from Roman Catholics. Some of these differences have arisen precisely because we are separated. Dogmatic and ecclesiastical decisions have been made without consultation with the other church body. These differences have been compounded by the assumption that there are also irreconcilable differences on the doctrine of justification. Now it will be possible to approach the remaining points at issue from the standpoint of a basic consensus on justification. Perhaps

this consensus can have the same transforming effect that our basic consensus in biblical study has already had on this and many other doctrines.

Above all, the completion of this Joint Declaration on Justification witnesses to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Many of us who have spent our lives within the Lutheran family can remember the time when there was hardly any conversation with Roman Catholics. We now look back with amazement as we see how far we have come. Beyond our expectations, beyond our plans, God has brought us to a new place. Indeed, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all the truth [John 16:13].

### *What we have learned together*

The effort to develop a joint statement with Roman Catholics has been an even greater challenge than the attempt by Lutherans to restate the doctrine of justification at Helsinki in 1963. Some of the same problems that were encountered at Helsinki have surfaced in the Joint Declaration. Other problems arose from the distinct doctrinal histories of the two traditions since the 16th century. Thus there are issues of terminology, definition, textual interpretation, and emphasis.

Anyone who has tried to translate a document from one language to another realizes how delicate a matter it is to preserve the essential meaning, along with as many overtones as possible. There is an inevitable loss of clarity, and, at the same time, a loss of richness. The same thing is true when one tries to translate the doctrinal heritages of two traditions into a common text. The words do not quite fit together in the same way; the ideas do not match precisely. And so drafting a common state-



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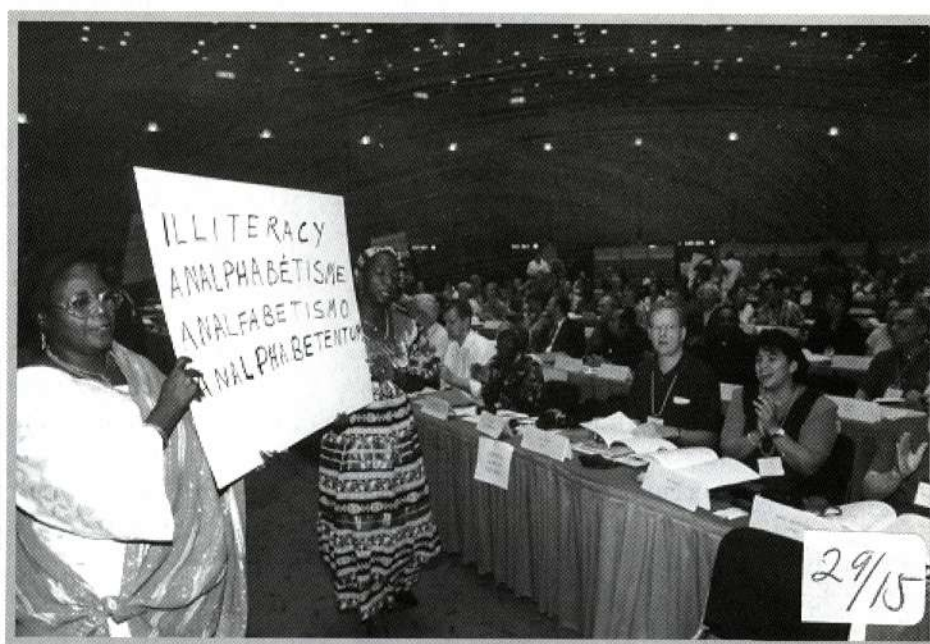
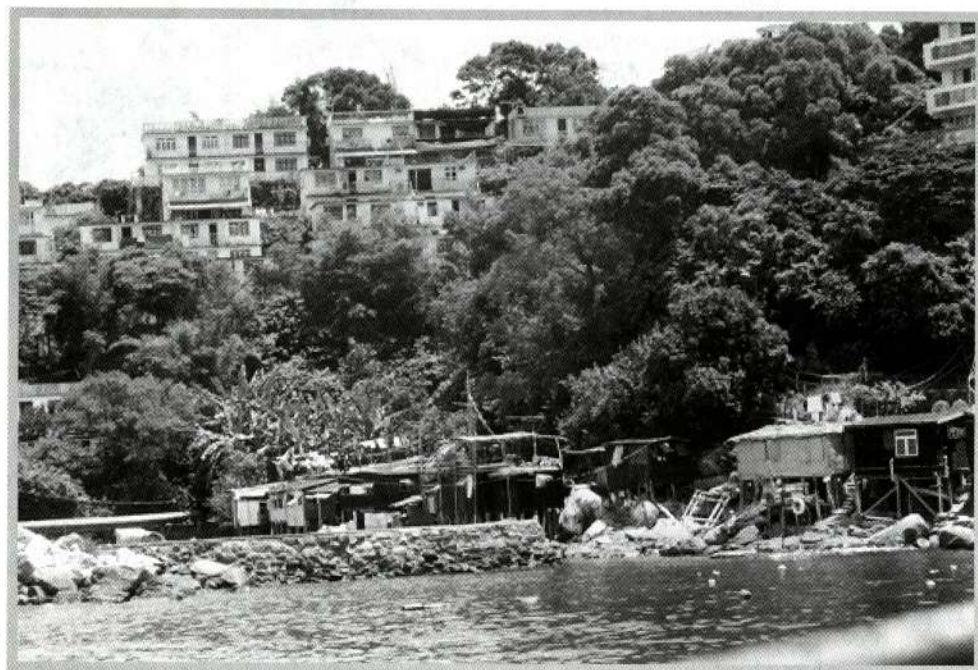
ment risks losing some essential elements, or interpreting them badly.

Furthermore, when a single doctrine is taken from its historic context, it is not easily transplanted to stand alone. It loses its relationships to other parts of the tradition. That issue has become particularly critical in the attempt to maintain the Lutheran view of the centrality of justification when it is examined within the Roman Catholic body of doctrine. Again, one risks accuracy and proper evaluation.

A similar question is how to relate the new formulation with other doctrines. The doctrine of justification does not stand alone; it has implications for other areas of Christian belief. But if the formulation is new, how will connections be made to those other parts of the respective traditions? The seven topics in Part Four of the Joint Declaration are necessary in order to deal with precisely this problem.

In short, it would have been easier to leave the whole question alone and not try to formulate a new common statement. Yet the rewards of the effort outweigh its risks. In dealing with traditional language, traditional thought-structures and traditional connections, we are compelled to go behind the easy repetitions of earlier statements and probe for their essence. In so doing we try to join their confession of the faith and make it sufficiently our own to allow its restatement in new words. The fact that this considerable task can produce a common statement makes it worth the risks. The Joint Declaration allows Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians to speak together about central matters of faith to a world that desperately needs to hear the good News of a God who makes all things new.

# TOWARDS A JUST SOCIETY





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## "GOD BLESSED THEM..."

*Kunchala Rajaratnam*

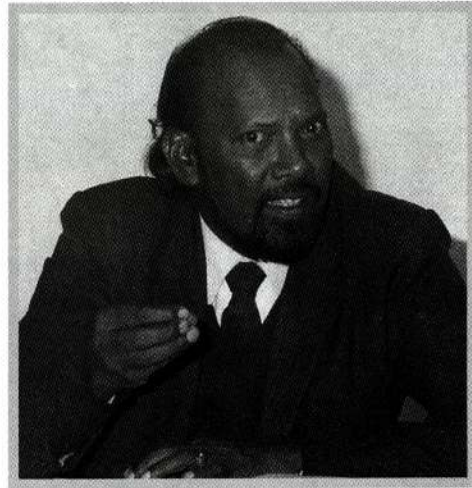
*God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over everything that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).*

### **Multiplication of Wealth on a Phenomenal Scale**

Throughout most of the time since civilization began, the agents of change worked slowly. Until recently, in historical terms, the growth of population was so slow as to be imperceptible during an individual's lifetime. Economic expansion was similarly sluggish. But since mid-century, the pace of expansion has been breathtaking.

Today, it is difficult to grasp the sheer magnitude of human population growth. The world economy is growing even faster. It has expanded from \$ 4 trillion in output in 1950 to more than \$ 20 trillion in 1995. In just ten years, from 1985 to 1995, it grew by \$ 4 trillion — more than from the beginning of civilization until 1950. Countries industrializing now are growing so much faster than in the past, simply because they can draw on the experience and technology of those who went first. Economic growth in East Asia, for instance, has averaged some 8 percent annually in recent years; and from 1991 to 1995, the Chinese economy expanded by a staggering 57 percent raising the income per person of 1.2 billion people by more than half.

World trade, industrial and agricultural production in the entire world



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have increased phenomenally. Consumption levels of both the industrial and agricultural products have gone up to staggering levels in a few countries. Newer and newer commodities enter the list of human consumption. Once luxuries of the royalties and the nobility, have now become the necessities of a sizeable section of the population of all countries. Since 1900, the value of goods and services produced each year worldwide has grown twentyfold, the use of energy thirtyfold, the products of industries fiftyfold and the average distance traveled by the well-to-do perhaps a thousandfold. Human life of a heavenly dimension has become a matter of common aim and achievement and the earlier pursuit of heaven as a goal of life after death has become a subject of ridicule as life has become so pleasant here on the earth itself.

*Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor" (Matthew 19:21).*

*What ails the world then?*

The earth has become par excellence a heaven for a few, and for the large majority of the globe's inhabitants it has become a veritable hell!

*Unequal distribution of income*

Since the nineties, the standard of living of the world's affluent nations is unprecedented. But at no time Mahatma Gandhi's observation — that there is enough in this world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed — is as true as it is today. The gap between the rich and the poor has always been there since the beginning of history, but today the gap is widening instead of closing. That is the real challenge to humanity. The factors that cause the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor to continue are at the root of an unjust society. The world has 202 billionaires and 3 million millionaires according to Alan Their Durmey (a recent World Watch report), and perhaps these families control the fate of the world's population. A hundred million on the globe are homeless, living as side-walkers, in garbage dumps and under bridges.

Americans spend \$5 billion each year on special diets to lower their calory consumption while the world's poorest 800 million are undernourished and are likely to suffer stunted growth, mental retardation, or death. 1.9 billion people drink and bathe in water contaminated with parasites and bacteria and more than half of humanity lacks sanitary facilities.

In 1988, the world's nation states devoted \$1 trillion (three thousand million) at the rate of \$200 for each person on the planet to the means of warfare, but failed to scrape together the \$5 per child it would have cost to eradicate the

simple diseases that killed 14 million children that year.

The condition of life that embraces millions of people in the world, more of them in the Third World, in the words of Robert McNamara (1978) is a state of "malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency."

As science and technology of production advance more and more, the income gap widens more and more.

In 1960 the richest 20 percent received 30 times more income than the poorest 20 percent. By 1991 the richest 20 percent received 61 times more income. The poorest one-fifth in 1960 received a meager 2.3 percent of the world income. By 1991 that revenue share had fallen to 1.4 percent. The income share of the richest fifth, on the other hand, rose from 70 percent to 85 percent.

These disparities prevail both among countries and within them. Almost four-fifths of all people live in the Third World where incomes are only a fraction of those in industrial countries. In turn, within countries in both these groups, gaps in income between citizens can even be wider.

The income maldistribution in the Third World is directly related to the fortunes of the rich 20 percent of the affluent countries.

The inevitable concomitants of this gross inequality in income distribution are widespread hunger, malnutrition, and disease and death due to these factors. And also homelessness: a fifth of humanity does not have adequate shelter. Of these 100 million do not have any shelter whatsoever.

This depravity is not confined to Third-World countries alone. A study done in 1988 found that in any given



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week approximately 500,000 to 600,000 Americans were shelterless, eating at soup kitchens, or living in the street. Of these, 45 percent of the sheltered homeless were unaccompanied men, 23 percent were children, and young people under 18, and 30 percent were single parents with children.

### *Infectious diseases return*

In 1993, for which estimates are available, infectious diseases accounted for an estimated one-third of all deaths in the world — 5.1 million out of 16.4 million. More than 99 percent of deaths from infectious diseases occur in developing countries, causing 42 percent of deaths, whereas in industrial countries the infectious diseases are responsible only for about 1.5 percent of deaths.

### *Refugees*

The refugee problem has become an ever increasing phenomenon in all parts of the world, especially in Africa and Europe. It is an indication of the changelessness of human nature more prone to respond to its own baseness, reflecting cruelty of abominable dimensions. Bosnia, Croatia, Rwanda and Zaire are examples of unsurpassable inhumanity.

### *Demographic and environmental factors*

Population growth — projected for 2020 about 10 billion — clearly throws out of gear such factors as food production, habitation, agricultural production, even supply of drinking water. The ecological base — inherent in nature vis-à-vis human existence — has been dangerously upset: water tables have gone down in some countries, endangering water supply for the essential needs of society. The forest covers of the earth, essential for plant, animal and

human life, are seriously eroded in several countries. Food grain production is falling short of demands of human and animal consumption. Fisheries production is seriously affected and, if not attended to, stocks of fisheries will be depleted before long. Emissions are affecting quite seriously the climate, the essential resource of life on the planet.

### *The burden on women*

Population growth and environmental degradation are interdependent. It is often forgotten that the burdens of income inequalities and environmental degradation affect women — who constitute about half of the total population and who bear the brunt of the inadequacies of social and economic life supports such as even shortage of drinking water. It is the woman that takes a pitcher, walks sometimes more than a mile in search of drinking water for the family.

Thus, we have a recipe for human suffering: maldistribution of income, demographic and environmental imbalance, the brunt of which is borne by women in all societies, much more so in poorer societies.

### *Causal factors of economic inequalities*

#### *Historical: nexus between castle and cathedral*

Inherent to human nature is the powerful overpowering the powerless.

The society is divided into two classes: the powerful minority and the powerless majority.

The minority controlling land and wealth becomes the ruler, the leaders of religious tradition, the priestly class, share the power with the rulers.

Historically, the nexus between the castle and the cathedral, the monarch and temple is firmly established, one needing the other for survival. Royalty

used real physical power and priests used the mythical power to subdue the illiterate and the innocent — all over the world. Society therefore was always divided into basically two classes, the rich and the poor — the exploiting rich and the exploited poor.

Exploitation in various forms was the common weapon of the rich to remain rich in all ages — in all facets of transformation of society — whether feudal, democratic, capitalist and even communist. Only in one case the politically powerful minority exploited society without the collaboration of religion — and as is well known, this venture did not survive long. This short-lived system was established in our lifetime and collapsed in our lifetime. The combination of the ruler and the priest is a formidable force that has lasted long in history and is continuing to do so, although in modern age the combination of the priest with the ruler is not that visible.

### *Market economy*

The next most powerful force that divides society into the rich and the poor, or rather brings society under the control of the rich minority, is the market.

Market economy is a ruthless system that perpetuates the rule of the rich over the masses. Science and technology, the army, the political forces are the pillars of the market. The present Secretary General of NATO, when he took office, defined that one of his functions was to promote the market economy!

### *Globalization*

All Christians in the world have been familiar with the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus who was destined to collect the crumbs from the rich man's table for his survival. That

precisely is globalization. The Group of 77 countries — the poor countries of the world — survive on the crumbs that fall from the table of the rich Group of Seven — the most affluent countries.

### *World Bank, IMF and WTO*

It is due to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that set the table for the Group of Seven and also ensure that a few crumbs fall from the table from time to time in order to keep the Group of 77 countries just alive to make the market economy work successfully for them.

The crumbs include the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the IMF to cushion the shock of economies for the poor countries that are forced to accept IMF and World Bank recipes, such as liberalization, devaluation, withdrawal of agricultural, power or transport subsidies for joining the global free market.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), the new version of GATT, is yet another mechanism that controls international trade, tariffs, intellectual property rights, patents and open competition, so that the rich countries' goods and services like banking and insurance also enter the poor countries, thus controlling the global market.

Globalizing the market is necessarily a product of partnership between the rich of the rich countries and the rich of the poor countries. The unholy combine of the rich of the rich countries and the rich of the poor countries makes the exploitation system of the globalized free market an enduring long-term facility for the rich in all countries to remain rich for ever. The poor are always with us!



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### *External debt*

The external debt is another feature of the market economy that enslaves the poor countries for ever, thus stabilizing the exploitative system of the market economy. They become bonded laborers to the rich countries. The poor countries have to work hard and export the best of their products at unbelievably low prices to the creditors, in a never-ending process of repaying their debt. Currency devaluation in the poor countries makes their exports cheap and their imports costly, a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose proposition. The poor countries continue to pay much more than what they have borrowed, in the name of repaying interest and principal. The fact today is that Third-World countries are paying around 70 to 80 million dollars a year by way of excess reverse payments; thus, according to one economist, the luxuries of the northern society are being paid for by the poor countries' excess payments. The small farmer in repayment of his debt — the interest to his creditor — hands over the produce of his own land and labor to the money lender as a bonded laborer. He never reaches the end of the tunnel. The World Bank and the IMF must be knighted for the exquisite performance of their jobs. The financial controllers of the poor countries must also be knighted for mortgaging their own economies to the rich countries almost for ever. The "immorality" and the sanctions that may result from the repudiation of external debts compel the poor countries to be faithful bonded laborers to the rich! The Third-World countries owe a debt of US\$ 1.3 trillion to the rich countries — to banks, governments and other international institutions.

### *On the reverse track to semi-barbarism*

We have thus before us a sick and wailing world. We have reached this state of affairs through the progress of ideas of justice, peace, liberty, equality, fraternity, human rights and through the unprecedented achievements in science and technology. We are on the threshold of cracking the code of the human cell that holds the key to life. Medical science has advanced to unknown heights of curative and preventive health. Yet the grip of base and cruel human nature holds society to ransom where hunger and malnutrition, disease, death and poverty on a scale and in an intensity unknown in history; exploitative economic mechanisms to trample down four-fifths of humanity in inescapable fetters of starvation and misery hold sway.

### *Isn't there a way out of this jungle of misery?*

The dauntless march of the human spirit, from the hunter's bow and arrow to the miracles of electronic remote control of modern bows and arrows in war and peace, the spirit of adventure and the capacity of the spirit for selflessness and sacrifice — seen over the ages all over the world — demonstrate from time to time the triumph of spirit over matter and beckon to us today. They represent that victorious spirit which makes a new world, a new creation out of the chaos possible; we only need to recognize the chaos and its causes.

### *Sustainable world*

#### *The world faces a twin tragedy*

- (1) The silent majority is trapped in a socio-economic global system that breeds poverty, disease and slow death, the environmental degradation that causes short supply of ag-

ricultural and ocean produce, of water, fossil-based energy and of other life supports for the rising population. The present generation's reckless utilization of the earth's resources without concern for the future generations' needs is part of the problem. At this rate, the sustainability of human society is at great risk along with nature and the climate, the crucial support systems of life.

Sustainability of the earth's resources to support the demands of an increasing population requires some tangible steps to prevent the otherwise inevitable catastrophe.

The shrinking natural resources — food, fuel, water, and forests — have to be managed in such a way that their consumption and utilization reflect responsible stewardship.

- (2) Human behavior — the culture of society — also has to undergo radical transformation: restraint on consumerism and profit-propelling systems of economy, extravagance of production of goods unnecessary for human survival, a new culture of production and consumption aimed at a sustainable society should be the new goals of society if the world is to escape a disaster of global magnitude.

*And wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" . . . So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And He said, "The one who showed him His mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise"*

(Luke 10:29-37).

## THE CHURCH AND ITS ROLE

The church — the Christian Church, the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, the ecumenical church — is very much present in the rich countries as well as in the poor countries.

### *The Church in the rich countries*

May I recall the early analysis of the factors of inequalities: the first one was the nexus between the castle and the cathedral. Even today, the church's traditional association with the powers that be continues. A breakfast meeting with the highest authorities of the state, an invitation to offer a prayer at state functions, is an experience by itself for the church. The church seeking the right side of the state is a common phenomenon.

If the abject poverty of the Third World, of the poorest 20 percent of the world, is attributable to the affluence of the richest 20 percent or 10 percent, then how can the church in the richest countries seek a place to sit on the right side of such a state? Biblically, and according to the theology of the Christian God, the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, and according to Jesus who died on the Cross for the sake of the poor millions at the hands of priest and state, the church in any country has no choice except to take the side of the exploited, be it in one's own country or outside! Otherwise the church is abetting the crimes of the state. The market is globalized: the mission to eradicate the evils of a globalized market should also be globalized. The mission is to identify the causes of the chaos in the world and confront them.

One recent example is that of Robert Runcie, the former archbishop of Canterbury, who had the courage to



issue a call to the British electorate at the time of the general elections to vote a government to power that would care for the poor and eliminate their exploitation in the world. Indeed, he incurred the wrath of the State. The traditional unholy nexus of the church with the State was delinked at least at that time! God's church stood up to its pristine glory.

We have also an excellent example from the Lutheran global family: Church of Sweden Aid which campaigns in Sweden with the state and other institutions on behalf of the poor in the world. The following statement reflects their commitment: "Church of Sweden Aid wants to protect life and create humane living conditions. We also want to identify and oppose the root causes of injustice, poverty and oppression. In this vital mission, we are all needed. Together we achieve more."

### *The Church in the poor countries*

The churches in poor countries indeed have a greater compulsion to take the side of the poor. The church in the world received new strength and new understanding of the gospel when the church in Latin America plunged into the battlefield on the side of the poor — to the extent that one bishop laid down his life. Thus the church in the poor countries has an unprecedented challenge to struggle for justice and peace.

The church in the whole world must confront the combine of the rich of the rich countries and rich of the poor countries who have become a formidable force against the poor. The international ecumenical church must challenge this unholy alliance.

The global church must act in unison in regard to human rights violations in many parts of the world. Denial of justice to the poor constitutes a viola-

tion of their human rights, be it in rich or poor countries. It is impossible to conceive of continued poverty and exploitation of the poor where governments have come to power with the vote of the poor. This betrayal of trust is a violation of their human rights.

The church's challenge is clear in the area of human rights. A global challenge is bound to be more effective than a national challenge. The Dalit of India, the Buraku of Japan, the Minjung of Korea and similarly exploited sections in many countries need the support of the global church in addressing these national challenges.

The church in poor countries has a challenge and an opportunity to join the struggle against injustice and exploitation within their countries.

Modern development itself causes inequalities, poverty, unemployment — for the fruits of development are gathered into the basket of the upper 10 or 20 percent, and the other 80 percent of the peoples, especially the lowest 20 or 10 percent are pushed into further misery. Can the church remain indifferent to this new form of exploitation? This is the case in most of the poor countries. The church in the poor countries needs to fight the new forms of exploitation and injustice. The weapon of research and communication must be utilized more effectively to address the challenges. At the moment the church in both rich and poor countries is only on the periphery in challenging the unholy combination of governments, multinational corporations, World Bank and IMF. The church must come to the center stage on the international and national arena in confronting injustice and exploitation.



*A case study: the nation and the Church in India*

In the year 2000 India will have a billion people to feed and fend for. In search of growth, development and progress, the Indian government has adopted the liberalization and globalization of the economy, as earlier, restrictive economic policies took the country's economy nowhere. However, opening the economy to foreign investment and participation has led to the clear but undisclosed and unadmitted realization that market economy and too globalized an economy can embrace only the top 20 percent of the population, i.e., about 200 million people! This is a staggering size for a newly emerging market. So better concentrate on this sector! If an economy of 200 million people succeeds, it is a magnificent achievement. It attracts multinational corporations. So the government goes all out in export, import, foreign investment, WB and IMF policy requirements to please the global investor — that is dressing-up the bride for acceptance by eligible bachelors like in the typical Indian cultural fashion. So far so good.

And what happens to the rest of the 800 million? Of these, 200 million (20 percent) are socially and economically outcasts of society. The annual Indian budget provides some crumbs to this section of society in the name of alleviation of poverty. In spite of 50 years of such token provision for alleviating poverty, their social and economic conditions by and large are still the same as they have been for ages. The other 600 million survive at a lower level slightly better than the poorest of the poor. Even according to the government, about 40 percent of the total population — nearly 400 millions — are below the poverty line that is absolutely poor in UN terminology. But the country's

media, the politicians, the businessmen, the industrialists, foreign and national, the government, above all the ministers of finance are excited about their successful policy of attracting the bridegroom — the foreign investor. The bridegroom being highly experienced in choosing the bride is pretending to be interested in order to keep the offer open, but is hesitant to extend his firm hand. Only 19 percent of the total approved investments have come into the country over some seven years of liberalization!

*The Church*

What then is the role of the church in such Third-World countries as India?

The church in India, as perhaps anywhere else, must be convinced that the human misery caused by the economic system, national and global, needs to be redressed and that such redressal is inherent in the imperatives of the gospel. A large-scale theological education of the people of God to contextualize the gospel is the primary step in the ministry of the church.

The church — the entire ecumenical church — is sensitized to this challenge; but the knowhow — a scientifically valid socio-economic analysis and articulation of the problems — must be undertaken. Not superficial concern and tokenism are required, but the church must develop a capacity for an in-depth and unchallengeable analysis of the national and global situation, so that the gullible common person in the pew or in the street is properly educated, and then the leaders of the misleading policies can be confronted.

The church in the poor countries must develop a will to confront evil and champion the cause of the poor. For this purpose, it must develop an informed voice and also viable action pro-



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grams that expose globalization as exploitative. The church must create sustainable models of development and work them out successfully.

*The Church is mandated to love, serve and sacrifice*

I am not talking through my hat. We in India, particularly the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India (UELCI), have been able to convert these visions into action programs by way of response to the social challenges, as a demonstration of the church's concern and capacity for qualitative ministries in the areas of service to God's people in India, particularly the poorest of the poor, the lowest 20 percent of the nation: the Dalits, women, children, and the rural and urban poor.

We have been instrumental in reshaping theological education in India, with a view to applying the gospel to the context of exploitation — Dalit theology, Women's Studies, societal analysis, the theology of human development, and ecology.

Action programs embrace transformation of the social, economic and cul-

tural life of men, women and children in tens of villages and enable them to assert their economic and human rights and exercise their political rights.

Our action research and communication facilities are pressed into the service of the nation, fearlessly questioning policies of society and state that perpetuate discrimination and exploitation and highlighting concerns of social justice and the environment.

We are encouraging the church in India to renew its life by building up the witness and service of its hundreds and thousands of congregations through a new UELCI vision of fourfold ministry — worship, nurture, proclamation and development — at the grassroots level of the church in India.

And we realize that our response is but a drop in the ocean.

We also realize that God's love for us in India, for the church in India over the centuries, has been as large as the ocean.

Therefore *"Love so amazing, so divine  
Demands my soul, my life,  
my all"*.

## MISSION AND DIALOGUE: WITNESSING IN A MULTIFAITH AND MULTICULTURAL SETTING





## INTRODUCTION

### WITNESSING IN A MULTIFAITH AND MULTICULTURAL SETTING

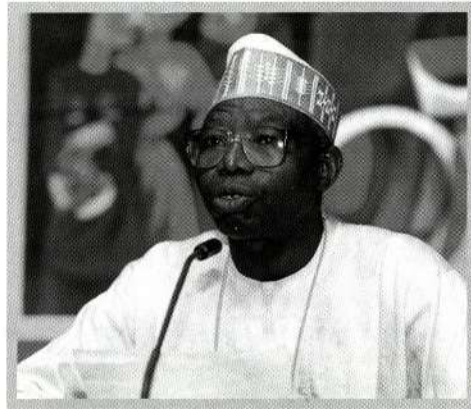
*David L. Windibiziri*

Nigeria has been a multifaith and multicultural country ever since the nation came into existence — from the colonial days until independence and up until today. The African Traditional Religion (ATR) is the original faith, and both Islam and Christianity must be considered as foreign religions that met ATR when they came. Islam has been here for close to 1000 years in some parts of our country, while Christianity came only less than 200 years ago.

Generally, our people have lived peacefully together with their different faiths and traditions for the greater part of this century. There were local tensions, but on the whole people accepted each other and respected the fact that some members of the family were traditional believers, while others became Muslims or Christians.

When people from my ethnic group during the 1940s and 1950s traveled to look for jobs in the tin mines, they could only get food from Muslims on the way. These Muslims expected them to do the Muslim prayers (*salla*), but they were not aggressive.

The general opinion among Muslims was that Christians would always tell the truth, and that they would not deceive anybody. Muslims respected traditional believers and Christians for being honest. When these said something it was accepted as the truth. Therefore, there was a general atmosphere of trust among the various faiths.



*The Most Rev. David L. Windibiziri  
Archbishop of the Lutheran Church of  
Christ in Nigeria and Coordinator of  
the Lutheran Communion in Western  
Africa*

Today, this seems no longer to be the case.

From 1980 when the Mai Tatsine uprisings began, the atmosphere among Christians and Muslims changed, and there were many confrontations and clashes that were quite disturbing. We know that the basic reasons in most cases were not religious, but religion became the cover under which tensions developed. Therefore the need for dialogue grew stronger, and we in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria found it necessary to call for dialogue. We have conducted two International Conferences on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in 1993 and 1995, and we are now working on the plans for the Third International Conference that will take place in August this year.

#### *Relationship Between Dialogue and Mission*

Some people fear dialogue because they think that it will close the door to mission among Muslims. This is a misconception. When you meet in dialogue you exchange views on the issues that concern all of us as human beings, and



you cannot do that without also showing how your faith influences all that you are doing. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Well, whatever you do ... do it all for God's glory".

Let me give one example. In our Second Conference the issue of Nigeria being a secular state came up. This is what is stated in the Constitution of our country, but through our discussions we came to understand that secularism is not compatible with the background, upbringing and lifestyle of Nigerians, because religion permeates all facets of Nigerian life. Therefore, we recommended in our communiqué that the government should officially recognize the country as a multireligious rather than a secular state, where no religion should be favored at the expense of others. If we did not meet for dialogue, how would we find out that this issue actually posed a problem to adherents of both faiths?

It is my conviction that dialogue and mission are so closely interwoven that you cannot separate them. Through dialogue you create opportunities for witness. Finally, I want us to remember that it is our work to present our faith and how it influences our lives and actions, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince and call people to become Christians.

When I was still working with the government my family and I lived in a compound with only Muslim families, and it became our experience that because of their lack of enlightenment they learned more from us than we from them. They went to the local medicine man (*mallam*) who would give them some concoction or an amulet if they got sick, but when my wife advised them and took them to the hospital or the antenatal clinic they became very grateful for her help. Often we had to

initiate and show then how to do things, but in this way we developed very good neighborly relationships. It may seem to be small things, but it is often the small things that matter most in people's everyday lives.

We should also remember that ignorance creates prejudice; so the best way to create understanding for people of other faiths is to enlighten our own members on what people of other faiths (or even of other denominations) believe. This will help them to understand and respect their neighbors. In earlier days, Muslims had a very high regard for Christians, but today they have become "friends in corruption," which means that there cannot be the same respect as before.

We should, however, never forget that we are all created by the same God as one humankind. We live in the same world and encounter the same problems. We are all exposed to the same natural disasters, we are all exposed to the same political systems and economic crises. We are all suffering from the lack of social amenities, like lack of proper medical care, lack of educational facilities and lack of job opportunities, if we manage to get some kind of education. We are all suffering from the injustice that is found in our society.

Therefore, what binds us together is stronger than what separates us. Matters of religion are of course of high importance, but why does it not make us fight together for the benefit of us all rather than fight against each other? Who will benefit from our mutual strife? As Christians we have a rich heritage to share with all our neighbors, and dialogue can be one way to create relationships which the Holy Spirit will surely bless. Without mutual relationships it may be difficult to find a way for our witness in our multifaith and multicultural societies.



## A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE:

### *CALLED TO WITNESS IN A MULTIFAITH AND MULTICULTURAL SETTING*

*Upasaka Ko Ping Yip*

#### *Why we need religion*

As we understand it, modern life is characterized by the fact that the world is getting smaller, that people have greater access to each other, that communication barriers are fast disappearing, that it is possible for one to know what happens everywhere in the world within a short time. Modern life is greatly influenced by the advantages and disadvantages of science and technology. As the world gets closer, more complicated problems and conflicts are created. We have come face to face with aspects of economic, political and military rivalry as well as the population explosion, poverty, pollution, atomic energy, moral valuation, juvenile delinquency, etc. To overcome these difficulties, religious leaders and scholars must do their utmost to play an important role in the world stage to prevent these difficulties from escalating to a crisis of the globe.

#### *Mutual understanding of each other's religion*

In order to have good cooperation and achieve the best results for all world religions, it is necessary to understand each other's religion.



*Upasaka Ko Ping Yip  
President of the Hong Kong and Macau  
Regional Centre of the World Fellow-  
ship of Buddhists*

In studying comparative religions, we should keep an open-minded attitude of goodwill, which will result in mutual good understanding of each other's religion.

Although the views of one religion are different from other religions in doctrinal explanations, it should be possible to compromise on similar ideas with which other religions agree. That would not hurt people's feelings and would give rise to peaceful coexistence among all the societies and nations in the world.

For example, everybody wishes inner peace of mind, but they use different methods to achieve it. Christianity uses prayer to God, but Buddhism uses insight meditation. Both methods will achieve the same results of communication, understanding and loving-kindness.

### *What is Buddhism?*

The source of Buddhism (teachings of Buddha) began in India and then developed in Asia. Now it is spreading to Europe, America and Australia.

Buddhism today is divided into the Southern School or the Theravada (the teaching of the elders) in Sri Lanka, India, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos; the Northern School or the Mahayana which covers China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, and the Esoteric School or the Vajrayana of Tibet and Mongolia. These schools, completely tolerant towards each other, are complementary aspects of one whole.

Buddhism is called "the religion of peace" because there has never been a Buddhist war in the past 2,500 years.

### *The heart of Buddhist teachings*

Buddhism is one of the great, well-known world religions inherited from 2,500 years ago, i.e., the sixth century B.C. The founder, Sakyamuni Buddha, discovered the law of truth known as the Buddha-dharma. Therefore, the teachings are natural, not created or invented by the Buddha. The word Buddha is not a personal name; it is given to the living being who is fully awakened or the enlightened one. There are numerous Buddhas in the past, present and future.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist life is to obtain absolute freedom, which is freedom from all evils and impurities of mind and of bodily and worldly deeds. A Buddha has the noble qualities of supreme wisdom, perfection, purity of mind, universal compassion and harmony among people. The Buddha said, "Cease to do evil, learn to do good, purify your own heart, this is the teaching of the Buddha." The teaching of Buddha is a middle way of self-development to self-enlightenment.

Therefore, a Buddhist can become a Buddha when he observes the disciplines and practices of the ways laid down by the Buddha. In Theravada's method there is the Eight-fold Path, which consists of 1) right views, 2) right thought, motive, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right *samadhi*, concentration. In Mahayana's method there are Six *Paramitas* (Perfection) which consist of 1) *dana* - charity, giving, 2) *sila* - discipline, morality, 3) *ksanti* - patience, 4) *virya* - effort, progress, 5) *dhyana* - meditation, contemplation, and 6) *prajna* - wisdom. The practical method of mind-culture and training leads to perfect wisdom.

In general, egoism or selfishness and ignorance or lack of perception are the root causes of all sufferings and confusion. If egoism and ignorance are completely eliminated, then truth or nature will reveal itself as the source of living and being. At that moment we could be said to have obtained enlightenment.

### *What is Buddhism doing with other religions?*

The 16th General Conference of World Fellowship Buddhists stated in its declaration: "We hereby declare that in pursuance of our theme, WFB Unity for World Peace, we are prepared to cooperate and collaborate with other religious and peace organizations to ensure full endeavors for the achievement of unity leading to peace and harmony of the world" (November 26, 1988, Los Angeles, USA).

The organization World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) was formed by Mr. Nikkyo Niwano of Japan. It promotes the work of world religions and peace by awarding prizes to religious leaders and scholars.



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In Hong Kong, the six religions of Protestant, Catholic, Confucian, Taoist, Muslim and Buddhist leaders formed an organization that has been meeting regularly since 1978. The Hong Kong Network on Religion and Peace was organized five years ago for the same purpose, and more religions are invited to join. Interfaith visits and dialogues between religions are held occasionally.

In July-August of 1995, a cardinal from the Vatican and the chief abbot of Fo Kuang Shan Temple came together for five days in Kao Hsung, Taiwan, to hold the first Catholic-Buddhist International Dialogue. There were about 50 participants, and a declaration was issued at the end of the meeting.

*Why should the Buddhist teaching be instilled in our community?*

The world problem is an individual problem. Therefore, war and peace within the individual are the main source of war and peace within the world. The change of practice lies with the individual. What is more, change has to come from within. Fundamental change can only be brought about by a system of morality which is at once suitable for the individual and the group without any conflict of loyalties. The Buddhist practical principles of the Eightfold Path and the Six *Paramitas* provide guidance for the answers.

May I now quote two paragraphs from my speech to the assembly of World Buddhist Leaders and Scholars Conference, which was held on June 5, 1982, as follows:

Our Lord Buddha contributed the two fundamental principles to the true civilization of humanity, namely, moral responsibility and mental purity, that is, the equal development of the mind and the intellect. Moreover intellectual civilization without a rational religious training cannot solve the problems of misery which prevail in life, and it results in tragedy.

Then let all of us rededicate ourselves to this noble task of strengthening our power of knowledge and intellect with a common purpose of observance of the Buddhist teaching for world peace. However, it is part of our duty to make all sentient beings live happily together and prosper in their right of survival and future development.

Last, but not least, may I take this opportunity to thank our friends in the Lutheran World Federation for inviting me here to talk about the subject of religious dialogue with the chance to meet so many honorable guests of other faiths. May I also congratulate the success of the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, and best wishes to the distinguished participants from all parts of the world for coming to Hong Kong on this auspicious occasion.

## A LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE:

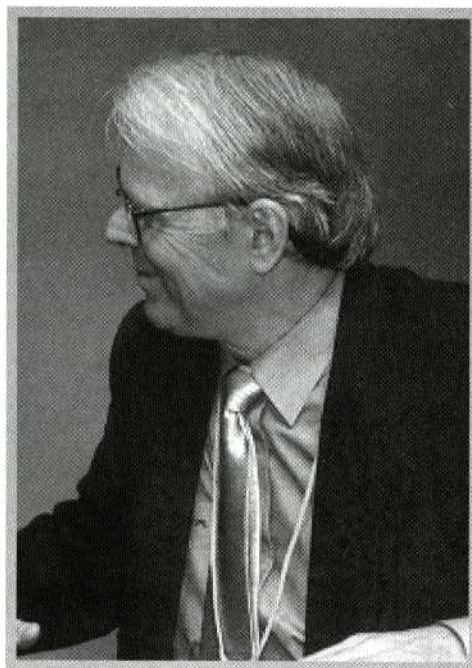
### WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF THE FAITH IN THE GOSPEL?

*Paul Varo Martinson*

Two assignments have been given to me. The first is to state what as a Lutheran Christian I understand to be at the heart of the faith in the gospel. The second is to suggest what this might mean for our interaction with people and communities of other religious commitments.

What is at the heart of the faith in the gospel? In John 3:16 we read: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." That is the gospel.

From time to time I ask my students, "What is distinctive about the Christian faith that makes it different from all other religious commitments?" Many answers are offered: grace, justification, trinity, love. Well, yes and no. Many other religious communities have convictions that are very similar if not identical to these ideas. In fact, another kind of answer is possible, that even a child can give. What is distinctive about the Christian faith? Only the Christian community desires to base its entire existence upon the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. No other human community does this. I think our Buddhist friend would agree that that is what is distinctive about Christians. Now, of course, that story needs interpretation. But whatever interpretation is given, it must be faithful to that story.



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in St. Paul, USA*

As Lutherans, we have a particular way of interpreting that story. I am not going to try to present that here. What I do want to do, is to indicate what basing one's existence upon the story of Jesus Christ might mean today for us, who are Lutherans, in our interaction with people and communities of other distinctive commitments.

Now let's look back at the story. There are three things worth noting. First, this story is a story of relationships. Second, this story establishes some priorities. Third, this story points to transformation.

First, this story is a story of relationships. There are three kinds of relationship: that between God and the world; that between God and the Son; and that



between the Son and the world. And a single word specifies each of these relationships.

Between God and the world the specifying word is "love." Now love is a very interesting word. Love requires a minimum of two. There can be no love where there is only one. It recognizes a real other, an other outside of me, an other before whom I am face to face, an other who is in its own freedom a subject. God and world are others to each other. Subject facing subject. Two in relationship. We have many parables of this. When the mother picks up the newborn baby, embracing, cuddling and speaking sweet words, that mother is in the business of recognizing an other, and shaping the possibility through which the child begins to discover who she is. And so, God created the world out of love. Love creates relationship. Relationship builds identity. "God so loved the world." Now we know who we are!

Between God and the Son the specifying word is "give." Now the giving spoken of here is quite a weighty thing. It is weighty because this giving defines God's relationship with the world. It is not a relationship of demand, of bossing, of requiring, of punishing but of giving. In this giving we discover that love is always vulnerable. God gave God's best to the world for the sake of the world. And the world was free to do with it as it saw fit. Love comes in weakness, not in power. Love comes in service, not in control. As we read in Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

This word "give" is also weighty because it identifies God — who God is. God is the one who gives the Son. The Son is the one who obeys the Father. As we read in Matthew: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). God is this event of the giving of the Father and the obeying of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The God who gives to the world is already the God who is a relationship of love. But see how that relationship was sundered on the cross as Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Pain enters into the very heart of the God of love. The Father suffers loss as the Son suffers death. Now we know who God is. Now we know what we are worth!

Between the Son and the world the specifying word is "believe." Love evokes trust. All constructive relationships in life are built upon trust, beginning from childhood on. This is true for parent and child, for wife and husband, for teacher and student, for friend and friend, for employer and employee, for those who rule and those who are ruled. Where there is no trust, there can only be suspicion, calculation, second guessing, maneuvering, alienation. The Son asks only for our trust. Trust concerning what? Trust that God is just like the way Jesus lives and dies. There you can know God. And the one who believes, who says, "Ah, yes, that is so," is justified, related to God in the only way that God wants to be related to us trusting God's faithfulness.

This is a story of relationships. This Bible verse tells me that the final truth of reality, whether the truth of God or world, is in relationship. One cannot get behind relationship to something



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more primordial, more basic. Even God is a relationship, for "God is love" (Mark 15:34).

Second, this story establishes priorities. What do I mean by this? In this verse, John 3:16, God is the subject of the sentence. It is God who loves and who gives.

Our relationship to one another is a relationship of equals. No one is more important than anyone else. This is so, no matter what position, wealth, intelligence or strength anyone might have. The shipping magnate is no more important than the retarded child that can never live independently. We are equals, nothing more. We are equals because we all live before God. God is the beginning and the end, the subject of the sentence. We are not equal with that subject.

We also have a relationship with the world around us. Perhaps we can lord it over others and nature and do anything we want? Not so. We have received our neighbor and this world as a trust. Shall we live with it and with one another in a trustworthy way? We will when we believe that God is the subject of the sentence, the subject of the sentence that tells the story of creation, and the subject of the sentence that tells the story of our lives. This story establishes priorities.

Third, this story points to transformation. The verse reads, that they "may not perish, but may have eternal life." We are reminded by these words that things are not all good. There is trouble in the world. We are coming to the end of the twentieth century, the bloodiest century in human history. This century also closes as humanity for the first time seriously risks disturbing the ecological rhythms of our globe. Vast powers have fallen into our clever human hands from nuclear ingenuity to genetic engi-

neering. How will we humans use our growing knowledge, ever increasing access to power, and technological prowess? Will greater evils befall future generations than have befallen our own?

God wants to bring change and transformation into our lives beginning now, a transformation that continues beyond the grave. This transformation comes about through trust. It begins with trust in God; it continues with trust in one another; it bears fruit in a trustworthy use of nature's good gifts; it is completed when God, who raised Jesus in the power of the Spirit from the dead, will raise us also, sinful and finite though we be. God's love never ceases. God's creating work never stops. And we by faith live and die in relationship with this God. "See, I am making all things new... These words are trustworthy and true" (Revelation 21:5). This story points to transformation.

What more need we say about our relationship with our neighbors who are Muslim or Hindu or Confucian or Buddhist? We believe God to be the subject, finally, of every sentence that rightly relates us to our world, including the sentence that talks about our relationship with our neighbor. Must we demand others believe as we do before they become our neighbors? Not if God, who is love, is the subject of the sentence. Is our neighbor also our friend? Well, let us first be a friend to our neighbor, not an enemy or a judge. Do we share our faith in Jesus Christ with our neighbor, inviting our neighbor to enjoy the relationship with God that is available to all in the death and resurrection of Jesus? Yes, if God is the subject of our speech. Not only so, but we hope and expect that our neighbors will want to share the best that they have to offer with us. Do we then listen to what our neighbor has to say to us?



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Yes, if our neighbor is our friend we will and must. Friends care about one another and what is important to each other. Friends honor each other. Friends engage in a dialogue of life, a dialogue of deeds and words. Friends learn from each other. In true friendship we are changed. Can we join hands with our neighbor as we work for a just and livable world?

Of course. As Luther says in the Small Catechism: "We are to fear and love God, so that we ... [may] be of help

and service to [our neighbor] in keeping what is theirs."<sup>1</sup> Should we risk life and limb for our neighbor? Jesus, we believe, died for us "while we were enemies" Romans 5:10).

Christian existence, based on the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is a life of witness to that story. If by faith we live in that story, as trustworthy neighbors we will live that story out in deed and word. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). This is our mission.

<sup>1</sup> *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism*, transl. by Timothy J. Wengert, Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, MN, 1994, p.21.

## A CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVE:

### INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF CONFUCIANISM

*Eva Man Kit Wan*

#### *Introduction*

Arguments concerning the religious dimension of Confucianism have been debated by scholars of philosophy and religion for many years. Confucianism, like other East Asian traditions, raises the question of what we mean by a "religious dimension" in interesting ways. Where Western theologies define the religious dimension in terms of a fundamental dualism between a transcendent God and a non-transcendent creation, Asian traditions are grounded in what has been called a continuity or unity of being between the divine and the human. It is because of this unity or continuity of being that the traditions of China are seen as having more to do with politics, ethics or morality than with religion. Here I want to argue that the Confucian tradition can be seen as having a religious dimension. But before we can make that argument it will be useful to first consider some definitions of religion and the religious dimension and then to outline some of the basic beliefs and principles of the Confucian tradition. In this way we will be able to determine whether or not Confucianism can fit within these definitions as well as how Confucianism might enrich them.



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#### *Some definitions of "religion" and* *"religious dimensions"*

Let me begin then with a few definitions of religion. These are not meant to be comprehensive or necessarily acceptable to all but they have the advantage of being broad enough to allow us to discuss Confucianism within the parameters they establish.

*C.P. Tiele* (1830-1902) defined religion as a "pure and reverential disposition or frame of mind which we call piety."

*F.H. Bradley* (1846-1924) stated that "religion is rather the attempt to express the complete reality of goodness through every aspect of our being."

*James Martineau* (1895-1990) claimed that "religion is the belief in an ever living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach & Basinger, *Reason & Religious Belief*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 4



Paul Tillich (1897-1960) speaks of "ultimate concern" and the "depth dimension of culture".

Each of these definitions specifies different characteristics, and as we shall see some will apply to Confucianism better than others. We want to follow W.C. Smith's suggestion in his book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*,<sup>2</sup> that we use the terms "religious" or "religiosity" or religious dimension instead of "religion". Smith has pointed out that the concept of religions as intellectualistic systems and patterns of doctrine is far from being universal and self-evident, but is a distinctively Western invention exported to other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> Thus with Confucianism we do not want to claim that it is a religion per se but that it is religious, manifests religiosity or has religious dimension.

#### *Basic beliefs of Confucianism*

1. Chinese culture believes in the interrelation and correspondence between heaven and humanity, and the interpenetration of the sacred and the profane. This means that the universe imparts to human beings their unique moral nature or at least the "seeds" of that unique moral nature. It is through the development of this inherent nature, these seeds, that one achieves sagehood. A sage manifests the benevolence of nature in his or her thought and action. The sage thinks and acts in perfect correspondence with nature and the universe. This already has elements of a religious dimension.
2. The moral nature of man, as understood by Confucianism, should not be confused with the word "nature" in the sense of Western naturalism. It is not the nature of man as conceived in the observational model of biological sciences. For Confucians, human nature is understood as the moral consciousness and practice which emanate from an internal or inherent awareness rather than obedience to social norms, doctrines or calls from an external transcendent being.
3. Confucian theory holds that human nature and the human mind is the excellence imparted by the universe to humanity. Self-understanding also ensures understanding of the nature of the universe. Thus while Confucianism can be considered a form of humanism there is the interpenetration of the sacred and the secular which transforms it into a religious humanism or a humanism with a strong religious dimension.
4. This interpenetration of the sacred and the secular can also be seen in the Confucian notion of *Li* or rite. Unlike Western traditions which separate the sacred and the profane by enclosing the sacred within religious rituals, Confucianism ritualizes the everyday practices; thus all of life is taken as sacred rite. In this sense, every act no matter how seemingly insignificant has religious dimensions to it.

#### *Recent development of Confucianism*

Confucianism has always recognized its own religious dimension in the sense of the correspondences and interpenetrations mentioned above. But, in the sense that we are talking about it here, such a discussion would have made no sense to

<sup>2</sup> W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, New York: The New American Library Inc., Mentor Books, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

early Confucian thinkers. Discussions of religious dimensions versus ethical or political dimensions are modern questions. Since the 1950s Confucian scholars have begun to engage in the debates about the religious dimension of Confucianism primarily as a response to questions posed to the tradition by Christian theology. In responding to these questions, Confucianism began to recognize and articulate its own sense of religious dimension including certain transcendental elements.

The conditions under which Confucianism can be considered to have a religious dimension include the following:

1. That our definition of religion not be restricted only to the existence of a High God or a transcendent or a personal God. Confucianism has been called a tradition in which the religious dimension is founded on the "immanent transcendental" structure of the human mind. The human mind is transcendent as it is ontologically related to and correspondent with heaven or the universe, and it is immanent as the nature of heaven is imparted to and internalized as moral consciousness. In this sense, morality for Confucianism is always religious.
2. If we consider some of the modern definitions of religious dimension such as Tillich's notion of "ultimate concern", Confucianism should definitely be accepted as a religion. Its main concern is the ultimate ground and meaning of one's present life which is the manifestation of the divine nature of man imparted by the way or heaven.
3. Though Confucianism is not a religion in the sense of being a set of

doctrines such as might be found in Christian churches, it does have doctrinal aspects and related practices. Such doctrines as filial piety or loyalty might seem on the surface to be merely ethical but when understood within the context of the correspondence between heaven and earth, these "earthly" practices take on "heavenly" dimensions. Salvation comes not through a savior but through the realization of true human nature (which is also the realization of Universal nature). The Confucian text *Chung Yung* (or *The Doctrine of the Mean*) summarizes the humanistic tradition of Confucianism as follows:

Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth (Chapter 22).<sup>4</sup>

In this sense Confucianism can be described as a "moral religion".

4. The contemporary neo-Confucian scholar Mou Chung-San suggested that both Christianity and Confucianism share a sense of transcendence. While Christianity believes in the supreme personal God, Confucians admit a metaphysical reality (called *Tian* or heaven). Its nature is the everlasting standard of the moral

<sup>4</sup> Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 107-8.



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conduct. Humanity is fulfilled by people who actualize their moral nature according to this standard.

5. Christianity's personal God differentiates and separated itself from humanity and thus becomes an external object of worship and belief, while Confucian metaphysical reality creates an internal correspondent structure with man which can be referred to as the "heaven and human relationship" in which heaven and humanity are One or correspondent.
6. If we take the Christian commandment "to love thy neighbor as thyself" as a religious calling to reciprocity and benevolence, there is a corresponding call in Confucianism. The term is *Ren* and some writers have spoken of little *Ren* and big *Ren* which is to say that in every small act of benevolence and reciprocity there is also a cosmic act of benevolence.
7. Confucians' version of religious experience lies in the realization and actualisation of one's moral mind. This is the manifestation of the Way of heaven directly via one's moral practices. This is different from Christians' experience of God through God's revelation or the Holy Spirit.
8. Finally, it should be noted that early Confucianism inherited rituals and folk beliefs of traditional Chinese religions which believe in Gods and ghosts. It is because both Confucius and Confucianism attempted to differentiate from these beliefs and practices that Confucianism is taken as a form of social philosophy and ethics. But as we have argued, more recent discussions have not hesitated to speak of Confucianism's religious

dimension in the broadened sense used above.

### *What Christianity and Confucianism can learn from each other*

Obviously in such short time one can only give a mere hint at what Christianity and Confucianism might learn from each other. There is of course the whole area of social ethics, the centrality of the family, the importance of ritual, etc. Here I only want to comment upon what Confucianism might contribute to the Christian notion of religion and the religious dimension.

It seems to me that, given the social and spiritual challenges both traditions face today, there is the need to expand our notion of what it means to be a religious person in the contemporary context. Confucianism contributes to this by overcoming the dichotomies between the secular and the sacred, by teaching us about the unity or continuity of being and by making all of life and relationship a sacred ritual. All of these stand in contrast with much of Christian theology but are also resonant with the fundamental ordinary thoughts and actions which are always also universal; that one's responsibility to one's family and community are simultaneously responsibility to the universe; that charity, love and benevolence are inherent demands of being in the universe and that even if there is not a high God through whom we might seek salvation, there is still a spiritual journey which each of us must undertake in our daily lives. All of these seem to me to be religious in any open sense of that term.

# THE LWF 2000 AND BEYOND





## A HEARING PRESENTED BY YOUTH

We, the youth delegates from all over the world, would like to welcome you here after this exciting and intensive week.

The LWF 2000 and Beyond — a presentation we have been asked to do about how we as young people feel and what we expect. We want to share our visions of the next century and beyond. Excitement, expectations and mixed feelings are in the air, but also hope.

The youth Pre-Assembly Conference in Bangkok was a very special experience for many of us. During that week we felt again and again what it means to be part of this communion. A communion that is diverse and feels very strange at times but yet having one very important thing in common — the belief in Jesus Christ. This has united us whenever we were working, praying or discussing with one another. One part of our work is this presentation. We hope we will be able to share some of our feelings with you tonight. Now we would like to invite you to see and share our visions. You may be an active or passive participant, whatever is most comfortable for you.

*For we cannot keep  
from speaking about  
what we have seen and  
heard*

(Acts 4:20)

So what have you seen?

I was present when thousands of people held each other's hands standing on the streets, lighting candles and praying. I was tight in my throat and overwhelmed by emotions when the Berlin wall came down and the borders were opened.

I have seen how a courageous but peaceful demonstration on Tiananmen Square in Beijing was beaten down with violence. I saw young people in desperation — people who only hours earlier were filled with hope and optimism.



*For we cannot keep  
from speaking about  
what we have seen and heard.*

So what have you heard? I have heard the voices of street children in Brazil.

*For we cannot keep  
from speaking about  
what we have seen and heard.*

So why can't we be silent? These words will be fulfilled in Hong Kong. I cannot be silent for I felt God's creative and dynamic spirit when we as young people from all over the world gather and experience communion. Despite the overload of problems we face as youth today, we are not silent, but have the power of witnessing to life.

These are strong reasons for young people to speak but there are also many who remain silent. Maybe they lack the self-confidence in front of a large audience or they are afraid of opponents. Maybe they are insecure whether they have the right to speak, but they know that something is going wrong. They don't know the right words and are afraid of maybe not choosing the appropriate ones.

We are not here tonight to be silent. There will be loud and silent moments. Enthusiasm and critical remarks will be very close to each other but nevertheless we invite you to participate. Young people are God's witnesses through events that they experience. On their search for spirituality many things influence them. There is a lot of diversity and variety in the church:

- the small parish where everybody knows one another
- a project or an exchange where two parishes from different countries work together
- a meeting for Bible studies
- women's groups who bring changes and different perspectives

- people who want to celebrate
- board members to talk about finances and structures
- a service
- people who have something on their minds and take action

For us this is not always so clear. There seem to be many controversial viewpoints and we are not always able to identify each other's needs. It seems to us that we are not as Melancthon said: "born to mutual exchange, our resentments keep us at a distance. We do not want to exclude and we also do not want to be excluded. We'll show you our vision.

*"Don't let anyone look down on  
you because you are young,  
but be an example for the  
believers in your speech, your  
conduct,  
your love faith and purity"*  
(1 Timothy 4:12).

### *Vision of an inclusive church*

We have a vision! We dream of a future in which women and youth celebrate equality in each and every avenue of life. We have a vision of youth and women leadership in every expression of the church, the Lutheran World Federation, our national church expressions, and our congregations! In the church of tomorrow and beyond, each person, male and female, old and young, together we will all be valued equally. Together, we are called to gather at the Lord's Table.

We have a vision! We dream of a future in which each and every church in this communion will ordain women to the ministry of Word and sacrament. We also dream of a future when our churches will embrace both feminist theology and liberation theology and will no longer be limited to a traditional



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male-orientated interpretation of theology.

We have a vision! We dream of a future in which every church will celebrate in its calling to be a safe place and an inclusive church. Called to be inclusive, the church will accept and include all the children of God so that no voice, *no voice* is lost and each person has his/her own share of participation in the body of Christ!

We have a vision! We dream of a future in which youth will be empowered to be active participants in our worship life and church services! No longer will youth be silent! Youth will claim their voice and freely exercise their gifts of the Holy Spirit! Together, the young and the old will lead in a renewal of the present liturgical life. Laity and clergy will together lead worship. Modern instruments, dancing, new songs in a new style, and culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate liturgies will reshape our praise, worship and thanks to God!

We have a vision! We dream of a future in which we will no longer dance independently, but join in one dance of many rhythms and styles. Together, our dance will be a dance of many colors, many gifts and many voices! We will dance in the light of a new day, in the light of God!

#### *Vision of ecumenism*

We are different denominations. Split up and divided by the conflicts of history by the conflicts that tear us apart today. We are different. Separated by our understanding of our faith, of our way of worship. And yet, somewhere there is pain. A yearning, a feeling that perhaps we should be one.

It is said that it is a holy communion when people gather in Jesus' name — at

least it is supposed to be. A communion in which there is a reign of transcending love and peace. But I don't feel it. Where is it? I still crave for perfection — for true unity. Is there something wrong with me or with the communion?

If I say there is something wrong with our communion do I become guilty? I was never taught to feel at ease with someone from another denomination — to accept others with an open heart.

I want to meet the other eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart to spread together the message of love throughout the world so that we will see our different traditions and understandings as a source of richness and strength.

Each one alone is too weak to serve in the world. Together we will bring Christ's light. Together we will bring Christ's love and peace and offer a place of community and love.

We are different — but we are one in Christ.

#### *Vision of equal partnership North-South-East-West*

We, the youth, dream to see the regional unity and equality of all people through Christ. As we are all children of God we would like to vision a "church" which is not divided on regional, racial, gender and economic bases but united in Christ as his body. Our vision is to see a "church" which is not always dependent on and dictated by another church which is economically and politically well-off. But rather a church which strives to be economically independent and enjoys equality among others — a universal church which recognizes linguistic, racial and regional differences but enjoys unity in Christ. So that there are no more regional or economic divisions among

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churches but rather unity, no more racial or gender discrimination in the churches but rather equality, hope, joy and oneness of faith in Christ. Let our visions come true, by forgiving and forgetting our divisions and differences and joining our hands to work for it.

### **My Vision call**

*In the northern corner of the world,  
the spirit of mission came to mind.....*

*The mission came to Africa,*

*It came to Latin America,*

*It is in Asia,*

*It is all over.*

*The mission's vision is clear:*

*Go out and make disciples*

*of all the nations,*

*In the name of the Triune God.*

*The string between North and South*

*came to life.*

*The string now tautened.....*

*It is no more what it is to be,*

*Something is wrong!*

*Equality is missing,*

*Cooperation looked for.*

### **Will there ever be?**

*My vision calls for it to be,*

*My vision calls for equality,*

*My vision calls for Cooperation,*

*My vision calls for Understanding,*

*My vision calls for Contextualization.*

### **Guided Meditation**

We will now take you through a meditation experience. This will be familiar to some of you. It will be new to others, but this practice is not new. It has been used in Christianity for centuries and it continues to be used in some of our member churches. We ask you to be open, to respect the stillness and the silence of this time. This is different from New Age or religious cults for we are quieting ourselves to allow the Holy

Spirit to speak to us. Every day life keeps us so busy. We have to listen to so many different needs. Are we really able to listen? We speak so much. We give ourselves no rest and no time to be still, to empty ourselves. We have to learn to trust ourselves.

*"Be still,*

*and know that I am God!"*

(Psalm 46:10)

We invite you to join as you feel comfortable. You are welcome to sit comfortably in your chair and close your eyes if you so choose.

What keeps your thoughts busy? You feel like a vase filled to the top. Not a single drop of water can be added. Where are your dreams, your visions, your hopes? They are covered down in the dark. Try to empty yourself to give room for what God wants to tell and show us. Visions are part of God's plan.

Imagine — you enter a bright room. You are in a church. What can you see? There is a colorful crowd. There are people, young and old, of different races, speaking different languages, the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, Christians of different confessions, people of different faiths. There are flowers all over. The light makes them grow. The colors the people wear are the same as the flowers. It is a beautiful picture. People are celebrating. They dance, they sing, they share their lives and cultures. African drums ring out the call to worship. An old women comforts a young man, a child speaks God's blessing, a young boy walks with an old man in a wheelchair, the pastor invites all to take part in the worship.

Who else is present? What else do you see? Which sounds fill the room?

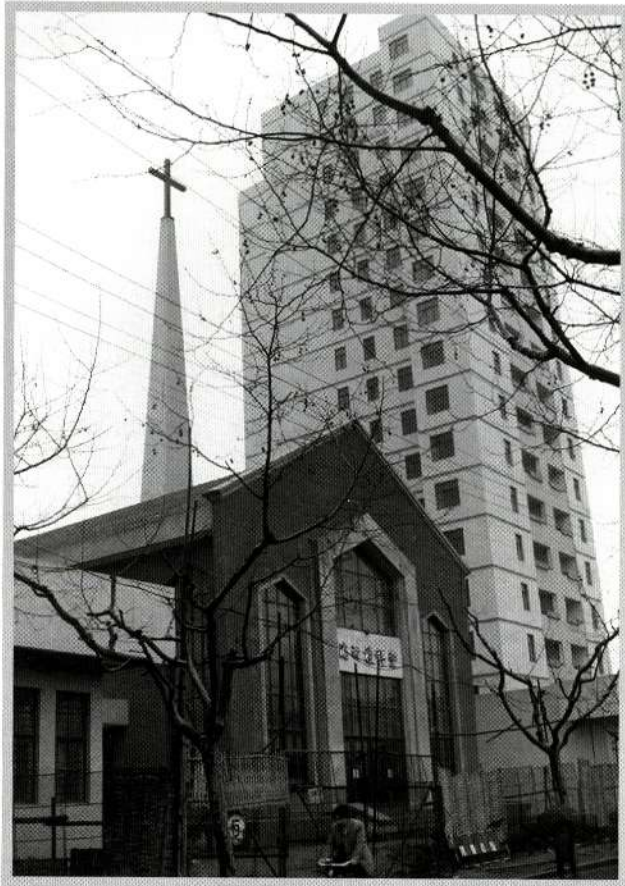


### *Conclusion*

Brothers and sisters, I'd like you to share very briefly with the brother or sister near you: what is the vision you have of the LWF 2000 and beyond? For this brief exchange you'll have 10 minutes and please write down your visions on the green leaves you have received when you entered the plenary. We ask you to leave them at the exit doors as you go out. The leaves will be attached to a symbolic tree which will remind us of our visions throughout the remaining time of the Assembly. I'd like two or three people of the plenary to share their visions of the LWF 2000 and beyond with all of us.

At times the visions fell on rocky soil. They did not have much soil so they were choked. Visions can help us to gain courage, power and hope. If we have no visions left, our future will be empty and without hope. I think visions have to be taken care of. You have seen our visions and maybe some of these are also yours. They are known to you. Allow these visions to have some room in you. Where do you find room in your church to bring in your visions? You might be the water that small plants need to grow or the light that they need to live by. You might take care of them so that there is no rock in their way. How can you see to it that these visions grow to be strong, and big and bear fruit some day?

## OPEN FORUM ON THE CHURCH IN CHINA





## LIFE AND WITNESS OF THE CHURCH IN CHINA

*Bao Jia-Yuan*

It is my pleasure to participate in this important Lutheran World Federation Assembly. I am deeply impressed by so many wonderful things I have heard and experienced in the past few days. When I received the invitation to speak during the China Forum, I thought how difficult it will be to address such a large topic in ten minutes. China is so vast, while the churches are so tiny. You may read and hear a great deal about China in this time of transition. Many reports on our churches seem so controversial. Thus before I start my report, I would like to invite all of you to go to China some day to see for yourself if my presentation is not clear enough. I remember that there is an English saying, "seeing is believing."

*History*

The first introduction of Christianity to China took place in the form of Nestorianism from Persia through the Silk Road in the seventh century. It is commonly known as "Jing jiao" and survived for more than 200 years and then largely disappeared, leaving behind a stone tablet unearthed in Xi'an in 1652. Successive missionary efforts also did not survive for long because of their failure to root Christianity in Chinese society and culture.

Protestant Christianity entered China in the early part of the 19th century, which unfortunately was associated with Western colonial expansion. After a hundred years of effort by missionaries supported by 70 different denominations, there were less than one million Christians before the liberation



*The Rev. Bao Jia-yuan  
Associate General Secretary of the China  
Christian Council in Nanjing*

in 1949. The withdrawal of the missionaries and the great changes in society after liberation challenged the Protestant church leaders to find a way to make the church truly indigenous. In an attempt to live down the foreign image of the Chinese church and to achieve a Chinese self-hood, they launched the three-self movement (self-government, self-support and self-propagation of the gospel). The results in the following years indicate the importance of the movement for our church survival and growth. We believe that there is a time for missionary activity, and there is a time when it is no longer appropriate.

In the late 1950s, Chinese Christians started merging together in worship and other aspects of church life. That strengthened the fellowship of Christians all over China and enabled them to go through the trial of fire of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976.

The Cultural Revolution interrupted our church life. Churches, along with universities and other institutions, were closed down, and ministers were assigned to secular jobs. As Christians

passed through that valley of the shadow of death, we gathered in homes as the Christians in the first century did. Lay leadership has played a very important role in Chinese church life from then on.

### *Growth*

Since 1979, churches have been increasing and experiencing a revival along with the tremendous economic and cultural achievements of society. The churches are being rebuilt at the rate of three new churches every two days. Various church ministries have been started again from scratch under the leadership of the China Christian Council (CCC), founded in 1981 as the organizational expression of the new emphasis on governing ourselves well, supporting ourselves well and propagating the gospel by ourselves well. Our churches are post-denominational. They feature mutual respect in matters of faith and maintain unity in diversity in worship.

There has been conspicuous growth in congregations and church membership. According to our rough estimates, there are over 12,000 churches open for public worship, among which more than 5,000 have been newly built. There are also approximately 20,000 to more than 25,000 meeting points.

In order to provide pastoral care to China's more than ten million Protestants, the CCC is now running 17 seminaries and training centers, 12 of which have been enlarged or moved to newer and bigger campuses since 1992. In addition, Bible schools and lay training centers have been opened in several provinces.

### *Younger leadership in transition*

There are now 2,700 seminary graduates at work in churches all over the country and about 1,000 full-time theological students. An additional 3,000 students are currently enrolled in the three-year correspondence course run by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Twenty-three provincial Christian Councils and Three-Self Patriotic Movements (TSPM) now have some younger people in positions of responsibility, and 61 percent of the full-time seminary teachers are below the age 45.

### *Amity Bibles printed*

Publication work has always been high on the agenda for the CCC. Bible printing has increased year after year, from 2.2 million in 1994 to 3.3 million in 1996. Since 1981 more than 18 million Bibles have been distributed, among them special pocket and large-print editions, editions in half a dozen minority languages, and an edition in Chinese Braille for the blind. To get the Bible to believers, the CCC now operates 45 Bible distribution centers, and much attention is given to providing Bibles to believers and home meetings that do not normally relate to the CCC.

In addition to the Bible, more than 8 million copies of the Chinese hymnal have been distributed. In 1996, a new hymnal containing 640 shorter hymns was printed for the first time.

### *The National Christian Conference*

In late December 1996, the 299-delegate national China Christian Conference convened in Beijing as it does every five years. It is the highest decision-making body for Christians in China and elects the new leaders of the China Christian Council and the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Com-



mittee. During this important conference four agenda items were completed:

1. The work report that sums up the last five years and looks to the future was approved.
2. A new church leadership was elected.
3. Chinese Christian "church order" was adopted.
4. New TSPM and CCC constitution was amended.

The CCC's aim is to unite all Chinese Christians, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with one heart and unity of purpose and in compliance with the Scriptures, in order to run the church well.

A careful balance is maintained between the life and work of the church on the one hand, and upholding the churches three-self stance and independence from foreign control on the other.

The four priorities of the Chinese churches are:

- Insistence on the Chinese church's independence from foreign control
- Education in patriotism for Chinese Christians
- Promotion of unity in the Protestant community
- Emphasis on governing, supporting and propagating the church well

In order to guarantee these four priorities, great attention needs to be focused on two urgent needs. The first is to raise the level of faith, ideology and culture among Chinese Christians, that is, to deepen their understanding of Christian belief and Chinese society. The second need is the renewal of commitment to the church in a spirit of self-sacrifice.

### Challenges

Ten tasks need to be strengthened in church ministries in the future:

- Leadership of the church organization at all levels
- Theological education and reflection
- Rural church work
- Publications
- Education in three-self patriotism
- Popularization and implementation of the new church order
- Research work for long-range planning
- Self-support of local churches
- Maintaining churches' legal rights and assisting the government in the implementation of religious policy
- Exchanges and sharing with the churches all over the world.

The younger generation is taking up responsibilities to keep the ball rolling in various ministries with one heart and a concerted effort to build up the body of Christ and to fulfill God's mission in China.

Under the two Christian organizations, ten commissions and two working groups were formed soon after the conference:

- Theological education commission
- Rural church work commission
- Publications commission
- Church administration commission
- Bible publication commission
- Minorities church work commission
- Women's work commission
- Tianfeng publication commission
- Ecumenical relations commission
- Church music commission
- Working group on self-propagation and working group on self-support

### *Vision of ecumenical relations*

The Chinese churches uphold the three-self principle, but that in no way implies self-isolation. We understand that a self-isolated church will lack vitality because a member separating itself from the body cannot survive and grow alone. We stress that the Chinese church is part of the church universal, and only in the context of fellowship with the church universal can self-hood be meaningful. In the same way, only based on the assumption of the independence of each member, can the interdependence among churches be discussed.

International exchanges have grown steadily in recent years. Since 1992 the CCC received 203 visiting church delegations and sent 108 delegations to churches abroad.

The Chinese church is willing to be related to any overseas churches and church organizations that respect our three-self principle and deal with us on an equal footing for the purpose of strengthening bonds between Chinese Christians abroad. The guiding principles for cooperation offered by foreign churches and Christian organizations in these projects should be that they are open and above board and meet the needs of the target people. They should also fit our agenda. Thus the partnership will benefit both of us spiritually and theologically.

Hong Kong's return to China gives us an enormous opportunity for strengthening the fellowship between the churches of the two on the basis of the principle of non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect. Let us pray together for the bright future and prosperity of our churches in Hong Kong and China as well.

### *Conclusion*

In this new period of openness toward religion and remarkable growth, the church faces many problems and challenges. But we understand that to achieve something means overcoming hurdles and solving problems. The following issues need your prayers:

The age gap in leadership is still there, and the rejuvenation of the church leadership is still proceeding slowly. How to bring up a new generation of leadership and bridge the big age gap caused by the inability to carry on adequate theological training for many years?

The need to strengthen pastoral care and offer a ministry that can cope with the influx of new converts is an urgent one, particularly in rural areas. Primary on our agenda is to find ways to speed up the training of different levels of leadership in churches and church organizations.

There are quite a number of Christians in China who have been strongly influenced by the fundamental belief that personal spiritual growth must be pursued above all else. They tend to separate the Christian faith from social witness. Christians in China are still a minority and we need to promote understanding for Christianity.

So, the churches try to encourage our members to be good Christians and good citizens. One should stick to the Bible's teaching and raise one's spirituality while living out a Christian life in society. Christian witness helps to create a more congenial environment for the church. We are called to present our faith in a spirit of hope, service and witness and in ways that challenge contemporary morality.

Jesus is in our daily life.

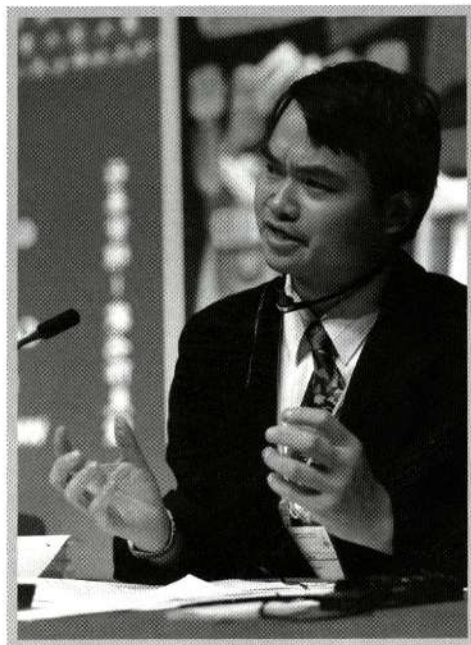


## LIFE AND WITNESS OF THE CHURCH IN CHINA

*Chen Xi-da*

Many people are very interested in putting the churches in China into different categories. Some call it the "three-self church," others call it the "house church." We do recognize the fact that there are a variety of differences between churches in terms of denominational background, places for worship, theological orientation, and political understanding. But, we believe that what is more important is the unity of the church, the principle of mutual respect, and the practice of "seeking the common ground while reserving the differences." Churches do not just exist in name only, but in the ongoing process of practicing their faith and witness in Christ. That is what really unites us as one catholic and apostolic church.

There are more and more Christians from churches overseas who are able to visit the Church in China now, and they realize that the Church in China has many similarities with the New Testament church. As "The Future and Hope of the Church in China" states, "visitors are often struck by the idea that the experience of Christians in China has some parallels with the New Testament Church. There is the growth in numbers, the enthusiasm and the simplicity, the dangers of false teachers, political pressures from the state and struggles over forms of leadership..." "I would like to present you the following six aspects that summarize the life and witness of the Church in China. These too have their source in the New Testament.



*Chen Xi-da*  
*Secretary in the Office of the China*  
*Christian Council, Nanjing*

### ***The Church in China is a growing church***

During the Cultural Revolution, the political pressure brought great suffering to the church. In fact, however, it paved the way for the rapid growth of the church. The church has been mushrooming at a dramatic rate. We can see how God has done marvelous things in China by looking at the following figures: There were only 700,000 Protestant Christians in 1950, but now there are more than 10,000,000. Thus the church has grown almost 15 times in the last 50 years. During 1985-1995 the number of Christians in Zhejiang Province has doubled to 1,200,000. The recent statistics in the Wenzhou region of Zhejiang Province reveal 620,000 Christians which comprises 10 percent of the

local population; 60 percent of which are under the age of 45. I was told that a pastor baptized 900 people in just three days in a county in Anhui Province. We often tell visitors that church buildings have been built at a rate of two new churches every three days. This year more than 300 young people took part in the entrance examination of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary where I am teaching. In the correspondence course of this seminary, 6,000 students have been taking a three-year program since 1989. In 1995, 6,000 people applied for the course. But we can only offer 1,000 places a year. We are really experiencing exactly the same kind of rapid growth that happened in the New Testament churches. "...And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

#### *The Church in China is a Bible-loving church*

The Bible is in the center of all that the Church in China does. The printing of Bibles has been seen as the priority of the work of the China Christian Council (CCC). The Bible is a main subject taught in 17 seminaries, Bible schools and lay training programs all over the country. Ordinary Christians treat the Bible in a very special way. It has been regarded as their most valuable belonging. I heard that when a flood came to the home of a Christian, he didn't think of rescuing any of his belongings except his Bible. During the dark years of the so-called Cultural Revolution, Wenzhou had been seen as a non-religious area, visible churches had been wiped out and all Christians were driven underground. Christians didn't have many Bibles, but they copied it with their hands. Without a pastor, they ministered to each other by reading the Word of God secretly, just as I experi-

enced it in my own home. They were not able to find a secure public building to worship God, but they organized themselves in an unimaginable way. They walked from different parts of the city secretly and separately at 4 o'clock in the morning, and they were all going to the top of the mountain where they were praying, reading the Scripture, singing hymns, conducting baptisms and celebrating the holy communion according to the biblical teaching. Then they returned to their work before the other people woke up. It was the direct encounter between the Bible and the people in the painful world that drew many to God, and made God become so real and relevant in their lives.

#### *The Church in China is a mission-minded church*

The LWF understands that "the call to witness is a call to mission especially in Acts, mission is bearing witness in the form of the story of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection." It is the direct encounter between the Bible and its teaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus that has driven Chinese Christians to mission. It is the "great commission" that motivates them to bear witness through words and deeds. In China we used to have many "barefoot doctors" who traveled around from village to village to help people. I used to call my mother a "a barefoot missionary." She represented a group of ordinary Christians who were clearly called by God, sent by the Holy Spirit, and whose lives were "the living letter" from Christ. They make the gospel and their faith attractive and relevant to people through prayer, support, giving and serving. They visit the sick, comfort the hurting, lift up the lost, and weep with the desperate. They bring people love, care and solidarity which makes Christ



visible. They do not have any foreign missionaries to help, no formal evangelism rallies, they receive no missionary funds to support them, and they do not expect the missionary agencies to protect them. We believe that the task of reaching the Chinese people belongs primarily to the Chinese Christians, and so we must emphasize "home missions."

### *The Church in China is a caring church*

In the early churches, "the charity offered without expectation of return or consideration of merit" marked a real difference between the Christians and the Romans. God's love and care was not merely a message, but a set of actions. The Amity Foundation has done a great deal of work in helping the needy in the whole country by its passionate, committed and competent staff. And the local churches and individual Christians are also taking their own initiatives to practice the Word of God through social actions. An ordinary Christian in Yimen Mountain village started a clinic in 1985 just because the Bible says, "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve." It has now become a big hospital after ten years of collective witness of God's care and love through their dedicated service in such a remote area in China. We can see how the biblical teaching has been practiced by looking at the following four principles that they implement: 1) supply quality service both day and night; 2) treat Christians and non-Christians equally; 3) give the same treatment to the rich and the poor; 4) receive the government officials and ordinary people in the same manner.

### *The Church in China is a learning church*

We all recognize the fact that there has never been a time in Chinese history when Chinese intellectuals have been so enthusiastic and open to Christianity. People are asking about the real meaning of the church in such a large, non-Christian and modernizing socialist society. People are so enthusiastic about new things and are willing to learn about the church.

When we are open to our neighbors, we find that there are many things we can learn from those that we used to just call "non-Christians," "Wai Bang Ren" (the gentiles) and even government cadres and communists. The inclusive gospel has become so attractive that the church is packed with people and their witness has been appreciated. A police officer once came up to a church leader from the Zhejiang Provincial Christian Council and said, "I want to thank the church for producing so many good citizens in my region. The crime rate is much lower here now than in other places. If people in my region would all become Christians, I would lose my job!" There are over 1,500 people worshiping in one church in Nanjing where I come from. There are over 300 young people attending the youth fellowship on Saturday evening. They join a one-hour worship service before they take part in ten different groups for prayer, theological discussion, family counseling and one group made up especially of migrant workers who have come to Nanjing. The Church has become "a school" which attracts people to learn, "a hospital" which heals people and "a faith community" in which love is shared, trust is built, and confidence for life is gained.

*The Church in China  
is a maturing church*

Bishop K.H. Ting, the former president of the China Christian Council often uses 1Corinthians 16:9 to describe the church situation in China. It says, "For a wide door for effective work has opened to me, AND there are many adversaries." This verse implies that we have a great opportunity to move forward, and yet at the same time we are facing many problems, difficulties and challenges like the church did in the New Testament era. We are thankful to God for the rapid growth of the church, particularly in the rural areas, but we are worried about the false teachings, and even heresies that are misleading people and creating divisions. We are very proud of being called a "post-denominational church," but we are struggling with the problems of restructuring the church, training enough qualified leaders and managing it in a democratic way. We are excited about the modernization and socialist market economy, but we are threatened by commercialism and worried about the corruption. We will stand firmly on our selfhood, but we do not want to be isolated as we were before. We really appreciate the prayers and support from our brothers and sisters all over the world, but we are sometimes troubled by their feelings of superiority, their denominationalism, and their self-centered approach to mission.

Dr. Han Wen Zao, the new president of the CCC, pointed out recently in a Christian conference that there are more problems within the church itself than there have been between church and state in recent years. The Church in China needs a spiritual revival among church leaders at all levels in order to improve the management of the church. A young woman pastor from a church

in Beijing gave a warning in her sermon to 299 church representatives from all over China who were attending the Sixth National Christian Conference. She said that churches must learn from the example of the church in Sardis in the New Testament era. A young church leader from a grassroots church presented in his paper that the *Liang Hui* (The Three-Self and the CCC) "must first of all understand what is really happening around us. It is useless to speak empty words... We will never keep up with the changing society by staying in the office, keeping away from the grassroots churches and only hearing reports and receiving telephone calls..."

We all understand that a mushroom dies as quickly as it grows. The church must be like a tree planted by the streams of water. The church must grow in quantity and quality. The Rev. Cai Wenhao, a widely respected pastor, hoped that the church must move from being a *Jiao Tang* (church building) to a *Jiao Hui* (the Church). Bishop Ting encourages local churches to put more emphasis on moral teaching and unity. Dr. Han Wenzao calls the attention of the theological research on "How I can help a good Christian become a good citizen in China." Prof. Chen Zemin asks theological students to be aware of the world Christianity and social changes. the Rev. Wang Weifan has been focusing on Christianity and Chinese culture. It is almost like the creation of the policy of "one country and two systems" that the building up of a Chinese church is an experiment of a "joint venture" which needs your prayer and support in a constructive way.



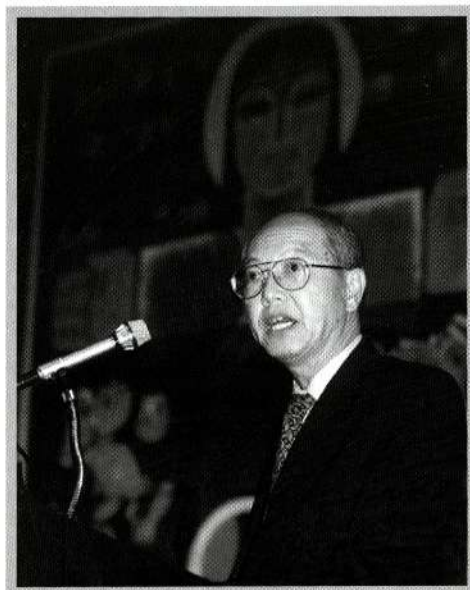
## THE FUTURE OF CHURCH RELATIONS BETWEEN HONG KONG AND MAINLAND CHINA

*Tso Man-king*

As of July 1, 1997, China already resumed its sovereignty over Hong Kong. Under the policy of "One Country, Two Systems," Hong Kong has expelled 150 years of colonial characteristics and entered into a new era aimed at "Hong Kong people govern Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy." Hong Kong people not only can create their history for the Special Administrative Region (SAR), but can also write their own history.

During the past one and a half centuries, the church in Hong Kong has made some contributions in improving and elevating both the spiritual and material well-being of the people. The church has improved the quality of life for Hong Kong citizens especially through its schools, medical and social welfare services and ministries. We give thanks to God for giving the church opportunities to witness holistically to our Lord. However, we need to overcome the barriers between Hong Kong and mainland China due to the differences in the political, cultural and social backgrounds.

Since the reopening of China in 1979, the Hong Kong Christian Council was the first Christian body to reestablish relations with the Church in China. At that time some local churches and organizations criticized the Council for building relations with churches in a Communist country. Yet, for the last few years, more and more churches and organizations have been



*The Rev. Dr. Tso Man-king  
General Secretary of the Hong Kong  
Christian Council*

working diligently in making contacts with the church in China, including those who had previously criticized the Council. This is a very exciting trend and we should thank God for his amazing guidance. I have confidence that the relations between the churches in Hong Kong and the mainland will be even more fully and closely developed in the future under the "One Country, Two Systems" policy.

There are a few matters of principle that I would like to bring to your attention for consideration as we try to promote better relations between churches in Hong Kong and the mainland.

First of all, bilateral relations should be a principal guideline for future promotion and exchange. This bilateral nature not only can increase mutual understanding and help develop consen-

sus on mission and ministry, but will also establish mutuality as members of the church on the basis of equality as partners and brothers and sisters in Christ's family.

Secondly, our relations should be based on the "Three-Mutuality" principles, namely, mutual respect, non-subordination and non-interference, which are stated clearly in the Basic Law (cf. Article 148). This not only can maintain the independence, equality and dignity of the churches in Hong Kong and on the mainland, but can also allow each to fully and freely develop its own characteristics in different contexts, to strengthen mutual support, prayers, assistance, encouragement, and cooperation as we learn from each other and grow together in spreading the gospel and establishing the church of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, with respect to the "Three-Self" spirit, many overseas churches have been polarizing the "Three-Self" church and the "house church," creating an unnecessary internal dilemma in China which is not helpful at all. As a matter of fact, the "Three-Self" movement was initiated to eliminate the negative aspects which came with the missionaries since the nineteenth century, misleading some Chinese to perceive Christianity as a "foreign religion," a product of capitalism and imperialism. Because of this misunderstanding, Christianity has not been able to root itself in Chinese soil and culture. "Self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating" are to wipe away the negative misunderstanding and to constructively establish Christianity with Chinese characteristics in Chinese culture, to merge into the land of China, to take root downward and to bear fruit upward. "Three-Self" has its immeasurable value and should be highly re-

spected by the people of Hong Kong and all over the world.

Finally, churches in Hong Kong and the mainland should strengthen their trust relationship for the advancement of the ecumenical spirit. Relations without trust are meaningless. Relations with trust can facilitate healing and forgiveness and can promote genuine understanding. Churches in the mainland have already entered into the post-denominational era. Although some churches still preserve their traditional liturgy and denominational characteristics, denominationalism is no more. From the ecumenical perspective, it can be a valuable model for reference. Therefore, as we are rebuilding our church relationships, it would be taboo to restore "denominationalism" which will create problems and divisions. It should be a mission priority to churches in Hong Kong and the mainland to build our church unity in Christ.

Early this year, a new slate of church leadership was elected at the Sixth China Christian Conference in Beijing. The working report "To Establish the Body of Christ" was passed. It was also resolved that in the next five years the church should focus on managing well ten important tasks. One of the tasks will be to strengthen the training for clergy and church volunteers. I earnestly hope that the churches and Christians in Hong Kong not only would pray for the churches in China, but also share generously our resources which we have received from God so abundantly.



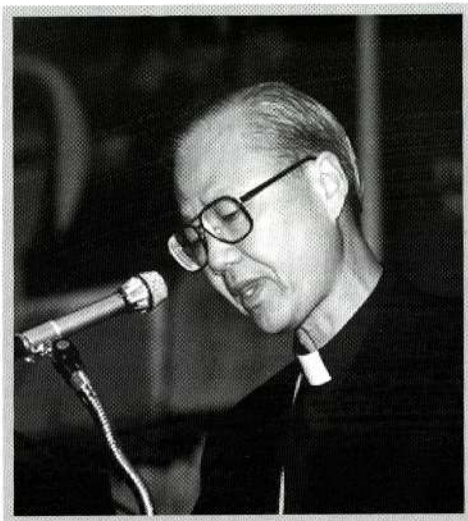
## THE POWER OF WITNESS

John Tong

Catholics in China have sown the seed of hope with much love and suffering. To illustrate this point, I would like to tell seven stories from China, stories which parallel the seven miracles recorded in the first part of John's Gospel. These stories show the reason why there has been a big increase in the number of new Christians and in vocations.

The first miracle is John 2:1-11, *Jesus changes the water into wine at Cana*. This episode reminds me of Sheshan, the famous hill outside Shanghai, with its seminary and Marian shrine. A number of non-Christians often climb to the top of this hill simply to enjoy the scenery. The seminarians sometimes place water and teapots on tables along the route as well as leaflets explaining the meaning of the shrine and some basic Christian teachings. They hope in this way to quench both the physical and spiritual thirst of curious travelers. Later on some of these tourists approach the church and become believers in Our Lord as the way, the truth and the life. In this instance water for physical life has been transformed into waters for the spiritual life.

The second miracle is John 4:42-54, *Jesus cures the son of a court official*. As a result someone high on the social scale and his whole family became believers. Healings attracted attention 2000 years ago and still do today. Strange as it may sound, most conversions in rural China can be attributed to exorcisms. Doctors are unable to diagnose and treat the problems of people who are possessed. Such unfortunate persons are apt to



*The Rt. Rev. John Tong  
Bishop of the Catholic Diocese in Hong  
Kong*

behave in strange ways. In the past, people were accustomed to call upon their shamans and witches to cast out devils. Today such methods are no longer effective, and people are turning to the church for help. According to certain reports, some who have called on Christians for assistance and entered the church have been healed of their affliction. These neophytes have urged others to do likewise. For example, in Jilin Province in northeast China, in a village not far from Changchun, there was only one Catholic family in 1981. When a possessed person was healed after entering the church, 300 other people were moved to conversion.

The third miracle is *the cure of the paralyzed man at the pool of Beth-zatha*, John 5:1-9. One priest who was arrested tells this story:

A secret agent of the Nationalist Party was one of my fellow prisoners during my years in prison. He had to wear leg chains day and night because he was both a soldier and a se-

cret agent. He also had to endure an exhausting interrogation. I sympathized with him but how was I able to diminish his sufferings, even a little bit? The words of St. Peter kept coming to me: "I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have" (Acts 3:6). I could really say that my only possession was Jesus Christ. Finally I said to him: "You are suffering so much, I really believe that only Jesus Christ can alleviate your pain." Then I briefly explained the Church's teaching to him and taught him to make the sign of the cross. The next morning I watched him make the sign of the cross. Silently I prayed together with him asking the Lord to strengthen his faith. Gradually he became more relaxed. One evening he spoke softly to me: "Jesus Christ is really wonderful! He has actually changed my suffering into joy!"

The fourth miracle is *the multiplication of the loaves*, John 6:1-15. There was a Chinese priest who had a small parish of 200 Catholics before liberation. Sometime after 1949, he could no longer function as a priest. Instead he was assigned to carry charcoal. That was a hardship for an educated man unaccustomed to heavy manual labor. He asked himself: "Why am I doing this? Is this the reward I get for remaining a priest to carry a heavy load on my shoulders all day long and deliver charcoal to people's houses?" But after a while he adjusted to his new job, and decided to work as a Christian. He could not preach to people when he delivered his charcoal, of course, but he could have a Christian attitude towards all those he

met. In the 1930s he was finally allowed to return to his church and to resume his sacramental ministry. But he could only preach and pray on church property. Yet 800 people now crowd into that church every weekend, four times the number of the old days, to learn the catechism and to hear the Word of God. The people remembered him as the old charcoal carrier. He gave a convincing witness to Jesus by carrying countless baskets of charcoal. He was once as inconspicuous with his basket of charcoal in that city as the boy with his basket of two fishes and five loaves was in the huge crowd by the Sea of Galilee, yet he now feeds a crowd of new Christians with the Bread of Life.

The fifth miracle followed immediately afterwards, when *Jesus walks on the waters*, John 6:16-21. People have reason to be afraid of water, as whoever invented the water prison realized. What is a water prison? Imagine a small, dark dungeon with a narrow concrete table or altar in the middle of it. The room is flooded so that only the table is above the water level. The guards take two stubborn prisoners who need to be taught a lesson and put them on the table every morning. The prisoners sit on the concrete, back to back — with no space to move until bedtime. After 40 days the men should either be crazy or ready to sign any confession, if they have not already fallen into the water and drowned. A Catholic priest was put into a water prison. His companion complained and cursed from the first day, but the priest decided to meditate and make a private retreat. Before long the non-Christian became curious as to how his partner could be so serene. He began to ask him questions. The priest took the opportunity to explain the Gospel and Catholic doctrine to him. Eventually the catechumen asked:



"There is water here, what is to prevent me from being baptized?" And so the priest baptized him just as Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8 of the Acts of the Apostles. The non-Christian had at first been as afraid of the water around his small table as the Apostles were afraid of the heaving water around their small boat, but when Jesus comes, there is no longer any need to fear.

The sixth miracle is from John 9:1-41, *Jesus gives sight to a man born blind*. Let me tell another amazing story from China about an old couple whom I met on a visit a few years ago. Both of them are medical doctors. They had studied together in medical school, fell in love and married. She was a Catholic, he was not. She wanted to be married as a Catholic couple and tried to convince him that he should become a Catholic, but he did not wish to be baptized. A short time later she had a child. During one of the political movements, the husband, along with many other intellectuals, was sent to a labor camp. The separation was very difficult for the wife. She had to work long hours during the day and care for her son at night. In addition to her loneliness and her hard work schedule at the hospital, she was under pressure from the government to divorce her husband and to renounce her religion so that she could gain political advantages. But she refused. Each night after she returned home, she and her son knelt down to pray and ask strength from the Word of God to endure the difficulties. One day at the end of the 70s, she heard that her husband and other intellectuals would be allowed to come home. When the day came, she went to the railway station to welcome him. When the train arrived, she and her son were the only family members on the platform to

welcome the men. None of the other women had been able to endure the long separation. They had divorced and remarried. When her husband learned all this he was so deeply moved that his eyes were opened to God, and he took instructions and was later baptized.

The seventh miracle is *the raising of Lazarus from the dead*, John 11:1-44. A seminarian in China once told me when and where he heard the call. His uncle was a priest. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), he was put on public trial and sentenced to death. He himself, who was then only a boy, was present in the crowd of spectators. He heard the rifles fire and saw the bullet enter his uncle's heart, followed by a fountain of blood. At once he heard a voice inside himself say: "I must become a priest to finish my uncle's work." That boy already sensed the truth of what Jesus said. His uncle's life, like Lazarus', would not end in death but in God's glory.

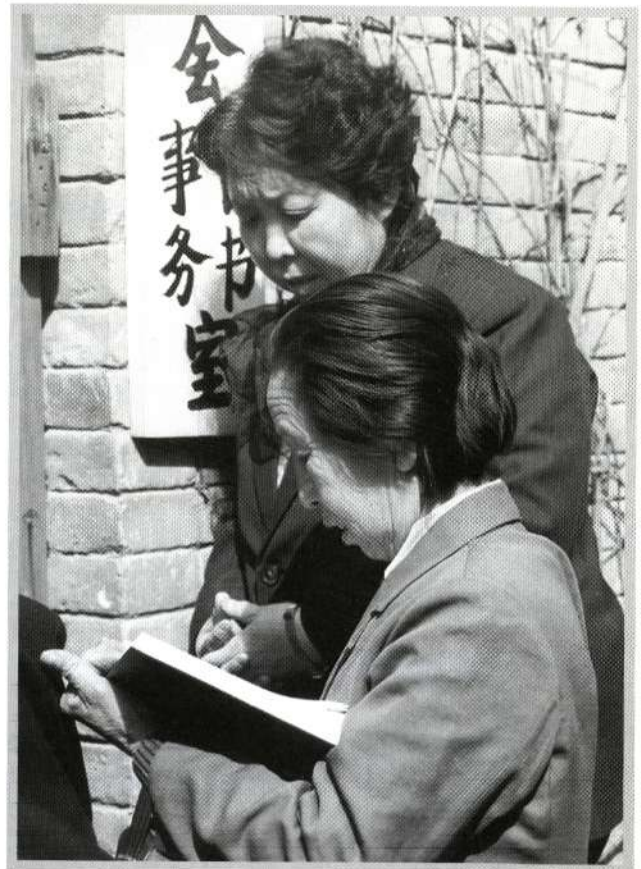
Just as we read at the end of the Gospel of St. John, ch. 20:30-31, that Jesus worked many other signs 9000 years ago, so also Jesus has worked and is still working many signs in China. They all mirror the signs recorded in the first part of St. John's Gospel and point to the greatest sign, the Paschal Mystery, which is recorded in the second part of St. John's Gospel.

All the signs worked in China, both those mentioned above and those not mentioned, reflect the truth pointed out by Pope John Paul II in No. 42 of his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

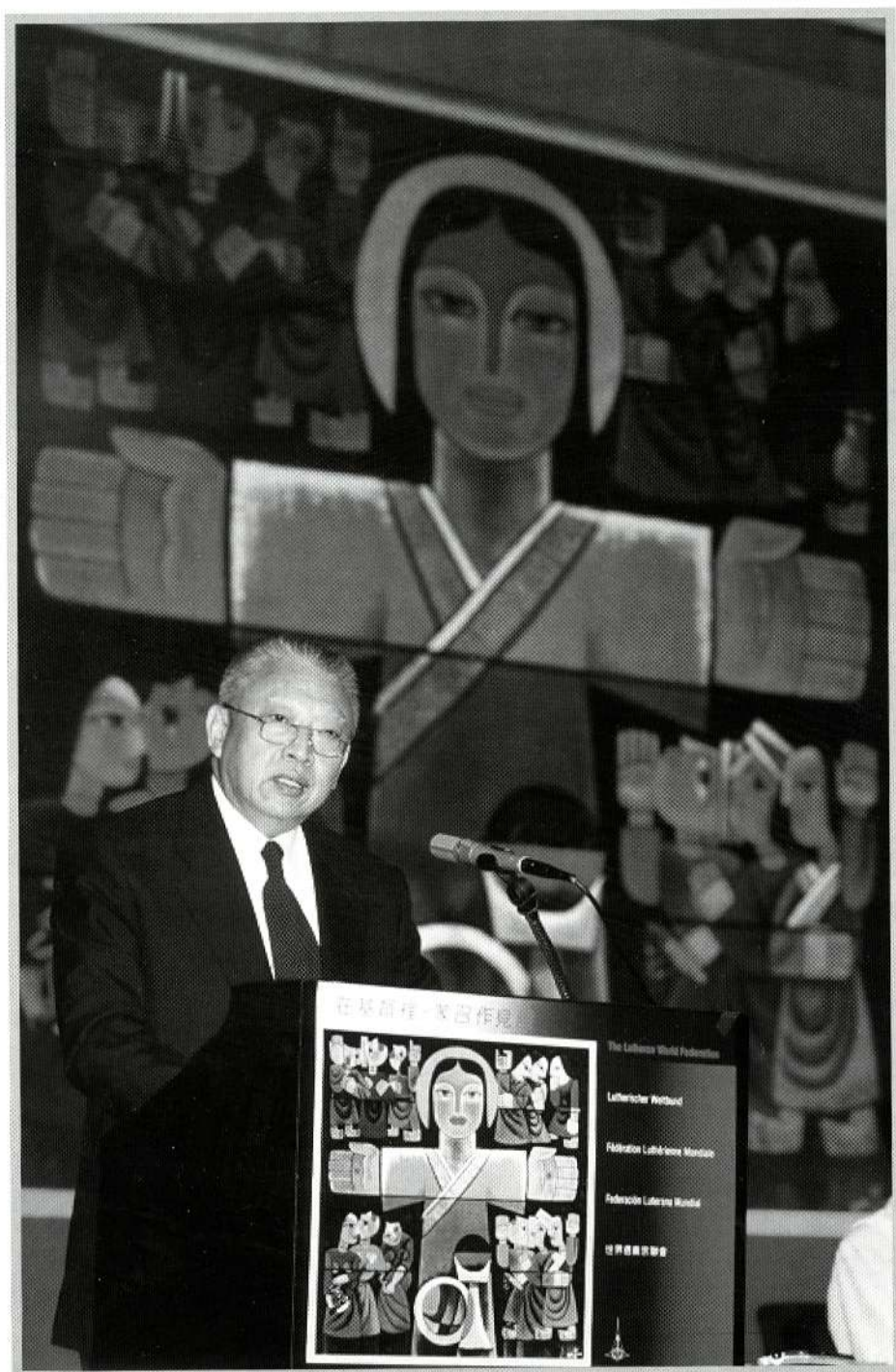
People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian's life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ, whose

mission we continue, is the witness par excellence (Revelation 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. The Holy

Spirit accompanies the Church along her way and associates her with the witness he gives to Christ (cf. John 15:26-27).







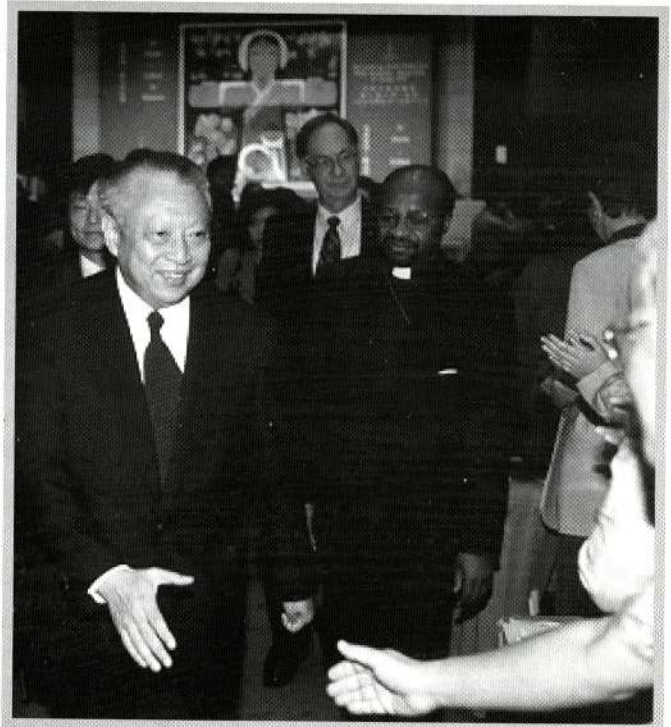
## GREETING TO THE ASSEMBLY BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

*Tung Chee Hwa*

Let me begin by welcoming you personally to Hong Kong as you commence your Ninth Assembly. I understand this year also marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation, and I congratulate you on achieving this milestone.

We in Hong Kong have entered a new era just over a week ago. On July 1, after 156 years of separation, Hong Kong celebrated joyfully its reunification with China. The historic event filled Hong Kong people with pride and confidence. Pride, because for the first time in our history, Hong Kong people took on the solemn responsibility of managing our own affairs. Confidence, because we know that under the "one country, two systems" concept Hong Kong will be even better tomorrow. Indeed the smooth and peaceful handover of the territory represents a new testament to the vision and ingenuity of the architects of the "one country, two systems" concept.

Under the Basic Law, which provides the constitutional framework for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China has granted Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy and has guaranteed the continuation of its previous systems



*Tung Chee Hwa  
Chief Executive of the Hong Kong  
Special Administrative Region  
of the People's Republic of China*

and way of life for many years to come. We, the people of Hong Kong, value this empowerment very deeply and we are determined to discharge our responsibilities earnestly and prudently.

The HKSAR Government will preserve the existing freedoms and lifestyle and ensure that the people of Hong Kong will continue to enjoy the freedoms of speech, assembly, association, the press and other freedoms guaranteed



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by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. One of the important freedoms that my Government will preserve is, of course, the freedom of religion. Article 141 of the Basic Law clearly stipulates that the HKSAR Government shall not restrict the freedom of religious belief, interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of Hong Kong. The property rights and interests of religious organizations shall be maintained and protected. The same Article also provides that religious organizations may, according to their previous practice, continue to run seminaries and other

schools, hospitals and welfare institutions and to provide other social services. Religious organizations and believers in the HKSAR may maintain and develop their relations with religious organizations and believers elsewhere.

I am very pleased that the Lutheran World Federation has decided to hold its Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong. It demonstrated eloquently your full confidence in the future of Hong Kong. And I would like to extend to all of you my warmest wishes and congratulations for a very fruitful and successful conference.



## SERMONS AT THE ASSEMBLY WORSHIP SERVICES





## OPENING EUCHARIST: SERMON

*Josephine Tso*

Text: John 15:1-11

*Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus  
Christ be with you all.*

It is a great privilege that the Hong Kong Lutheran Federation can welcome you to Hong Kong. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to host the Ninth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation with the celebration of its 50th Anniversary. We give thanks to God for this honor and pray that our time together here will be very fruitful and blessed.

Our text for today, John 15:1-11, tells us about the very close relationship between Christ Jesus and His followers. "I am the true vine and you are the branches. Abide in me as I abide in you!" Branches apart from the tree can produce nothing; lives away from Christ share the same fate! My first point is that we once had no relationship with the Lord of Life. We knew nothing about Him. Like many other unbelievers, we sought after the things of this world, with no concern for eternity. It is because of God's mercy and the faithful commitment of the early missionaries, that we came to know the love and acceptance we can have in Christ. I heard nothing about Christ until I was eight years old. Because of an invitation of our neighbor, we, my family, came in contact with the Grace Lutheran Church. For us five children, the church was not only a place of fun and stories and hymns, but also, through baptism in faith, a place of growth in my relationship with God. Ever since



*The Rev. Josephine Tso Shui-wan  
President of the Evangelical Lutheran  
Church of Hong Kong and Chairperson  
of the Hong Kong Lutheran Federation*

that time, He has been very precious to each of us.

This is the same experience of many Christians in Hong Kong. Many of them are the first Christians in their families. Many are of Buddhist or folk religion background. Yet as was said in I Timothy 1:15 "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Their lives are not the same after being connected to the very source of Life, the Truth and the Way. It is through faith by grace that we are joined to the true vine.

My second point is from verse 5: "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." By the pruning and cleansing of the vine growers, the branches give much fruit. This is very important, because it is the result of a relationship in which God provides and God sustains. What kind of fruit do we bear when we are in Christ? Sometimes we try to search for fruit in our lives to

see evidence of the relationship we have with Him. This is not necessary, because fruit comes naturally, whether you notice or not. If we are in Christ, it is through Him, the work of the grower causes us to bear many fruits. As the Lutheran World Federation celebrates its 50 years, it is an appropriate time to count the fruits. What kind of fruits do we lay before the altar? There must be many. Many of these you remember very well. I want to mention just one of the many you may have forgotten, or perhaps never knew.

A few weeks ago I received a telephone call from an elderly woman, who is in her seventies. She obtained my telephone number from the operator of the telephone company. She called and asked if I knew an organization named Lutheran World Service. She was one of the recipients of school fee grants for her children in the 1950s. Her children are now grown up, with their own families. Yet she cannot forget the assistance given to her in those days. She wanted to donate some money to express her gratitude. I do not think she can give very much. She told me that she still has to work for her living even at this age. However the love that touched her life was never forgotten.

In fact, my church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, was also a fruit which came into being from the relief work of Lutheran World Service in Hong Kong in the 1950s. Many of our first generation members in the 1950s were gathered in the same manner. In the early days, one even worried whether these people came to Christ just because of butter and cheese. But now we know that the labor in Jesus Christ, the act of love given to even little ones, was never in vain.

Now I direct your attention to verses 7 to 8; my third point is that

fruits coming naturally bring glory to the vine. For the fruits tell us about the trees. Every fruit out of our life that we bear in Christ gives Him the glory. Sometimes it speaks very loudly, sometimes it influences very deeply. During the 1960s, in the days of the Cultural Revolution, the church in China ceased almost all its activities. Many people outside China feared that perhaps the church no longer existed. But later we found that the church continued to grow and flourish. That the number of believers increased greatly when churches reopened, gives evidence of the fruit being borne by Christian witnessing during the time of persecution.

During the Cultural Revolution, some Christians did not even tell others that they were followers of Jesus Christ. But in their work, in their lives, they bore good fruits, and people gradually recognized that they were Christians. Their love and joy in Jesus Christ in all circumstances attracted people to God. And because of the witness of these Christians, their colleagues, their friends, their relatives came to know the God in whom they believed, and they became Christians. Although they did not want to tell others that they were followers of Christ, their being Christians was naturally lived out, just like a city built on the hill, which could not be hidden.

As we gather for this Assembly, our theme is, "In Christ — Called to Witness." We need to be reminded, in this world where we can be very busy and very concerned about earthly matters, even in the church, that apart from Christ we can do nothing. We must hold onto an awareness of our relationship with Him, and nurture our relationship with Christ.

As we look back to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran World



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Federation's establishment, we may look back and count the fruits that have been borne. And it is appropriate to give thanks to and to honor those who have labored in its service. But we must also give glory to God from whom all the fruits come, as we live and serve Christ.

As we look to the future and plan for our cooperation in ministry, we need to prayerfully consider how we best proclaim and serve so that God is glorified and Christ is lifted up and people are drawn to Him.

This is the very first time that the Assembly has met in Asia. In this great continent with over half of the world's population, and some of the greatest obstacles to the gospel, stands the smallest Christian church. For the Asian churches, it is both a great challenge and a great opportunity to be in the midst of such a situation. As we are one body in Christ, and members of one another; as we are branches together in the same vine, let us share together in meeting the challenges that remain before us in God's mission. Let us respond together to the call God has given to us to reap the harvest in the fields of Asia.

## 50TH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION: SERMON

*Horst Hirschler*

May the grace and the peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you! Amen.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul writes (1:16f.), "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written [Habakkuk 2:4], 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" Amen.

Dear sisters and brothers!

In Christ — Called to Witness. This is the theme of our Assembly.

Paul sounds like the blast of a trumpet: I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Paul is writing this in a context in which as a Christian he is part of a scanty minority. This does not bother him at all. What is at stake for him is the gospel as God's saving power.

During today's service we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation. We are celebrating it here in Hong Kong and we are celebrating this anniversary in our congregations and churches all round the world.

Let us not forget that we are celebrating this anniversary here in Hong Kong.

We are most grateful for the impressive hospitality of the Lutheran and indeed also the other Christian churches here in Hong Kong that have received us so graciously. It is a great honor and



*The Rt. Rev. Horst Hirschler  
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran  
Church of Hanover, Germany, and a  
Vice-President of the LWF*

joy for us to be here with you. We are fascinated by this great and important city of Hong Kong. Most of us are here for the first time in our lives.

In these weeks of significant political change many people all over the world are thinking of those who live here. We are grateful that we are able to experience this for you novel and, in many ways, worrying situation at close quarters. Thanks to this we have concrete notions for our prayers. In the future, we will keep you attentively in our prayers.

This anniversary which we are celebrating here and now on this Sunday is also being celebrated in our Lutheran congregations and churches around the world. They are using the same texts and singing the same hymns, and we are in their thoughts and prayers.

It is a day of joy and thanksgiving for an abundance of signs of worldwide



Christian community. Moreover, it is a day when we consider the question: What are we in fact doing when we celebrate 50 years' existence of the Lutheran World Federation?

Should we be proud of having been in existence for so long? Yet, 50 years is not all that much. There have been Lutheran churches for much longer, and Christianity is preparing to commemorate the year 2000 after Christ's birth.

Should we look back upon the greater worldwide communion between our churches? Yes, this is justified. Much has happened in this respect since the First Assembly held in Lund in 1947. We must be grateful for

- the theological work
- assistance for contemporary witness
- ecumenical conversations
- the diaconal and missionary ministry.

Let us then celebrate ourselves and declare: Yes, we need not be ashamed before the world for we have done good work in these 50 years.

But Paul was not writing, I am not ashamed of my successes. Rather he wrote, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Apparently for him this is more important than anything we can do ourselves.

Our biblical text contains those famous words which caused Martin Luther to become a reformer. In 1545, a year before his death, he recounted eloquently how much almost 30 years earlier he had hated this "righteousness" of God: He wrote:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners.... Nevertheless, I beat

importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely,... "He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. ... "He who through faith is righteous shall live." And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith. ... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

What happened here? All of a sudden this Dr. Martinus Luther understood where his dignity, his reputation, his identity came from. He understood: It is not alone through my good works that my life is worth something before God and human beings. No, my identity and my dignity are derived from Christ.

For this reason, the artist Lukas Cranach painted the famous altar piece which can still be seen in the city church in Wittenberg. On the right hand side, Luther is seen preaching from the pulpit. On the left hand side, we see the congregation. Luther's left hand is on the Bible. With his right hand, he points to the crucified Christ in the middle of the painting.

This painting illustrates why there are Lutheran Christians in the whole world and what the Lutheran World Federation is there for: It is our task to point to Christ. He alone is our right-

teousness. Faith alone gives us inner stability and dignity.

How do we then properly celebrate this anniversary? Not by being enthusiastic about our achievements. We do not point to ourselves and we do not point to Luther. No, with Luther we point to Christ. And in so doing so we are serving the unity of Christianity worldwide.

In our lesson from the Letter to the Ephesians it is written: "Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In Christ there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

This means that the unity of the church is made up of our common link with Christ. Whoever is baptized and believes in Christ as redeemer is member of the body of Christ and thus linked with all who believe and are baptized.

For this reason, the painting of Martin Luther who points to the Holy Scriptures and to Christ is an ecumenical painting.

In these months, we are in our churches and congregations discussing the proposed Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. This gives cause for joy and thankfulness. Christ alone whose saving work for us, which we grasp in faith, is the cause for the unity of the church. If we say this together, and the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches declare that the old doctrinal condemnations no longer apply to that which we have formulated, then it will be exciting to see what this will mean in terms of church communion in the future. God

willing, it will not remain without positive consequences.

But is this not just internal church talk? Is it meaningful at all for people when we confess, "In Christ — Called to Witness" and point to the crucified Christ?

Is it not more necessary that we point to ourselves and to other people? In our world we need efficient politicians, scientists, technicians, doctors, social workers, men and women, mothers and fathers, young and old people who act responsibly before God and human beings so that we can at least begin to deal with the problems of this world. Since the major problems of our world are caused by human beings, human beings also have to solve them.

Human beings today can do so very much. Many of us would not even be alive today were it not for modern medicine. Without worldwide air transport we would not be here in Hong Kong, and without modern communication technology people would not know what we are doing here. This, of course, also has its side effects, and many of the things that people are capable of frighten us.

Is the Christian faith needed for all this? Paul writes, I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God. Where do we notice something of this power of God? Are we not too often ashamed of our faith? What do people need our witness for?

At the synod of the Lutheran churches in Germany last fall a young pastor from eastern Germany, the part that used to be under Communist, atheist rule before the wall was torn down, spoke about how he had come to a high school to give Christian instruction for the first time.

Never before under Communist rule had he been allowed to enter this



school. Now he enters the large staff room. About 50 teachers, male and female, are present. As he learns later, none of them is a member of a Christian church. This is what the Communist state accomplished in the country of the Reformation. The teachers look at the young man with cool curiosity. He gives his name and adds, "I will give Christian instruction here every week. I am a pastor." Hostile silence. Somebody then says, "What is this all about? A pastor here? What is this all about God who does not exist?"

The pastor recounts that he was extremely annoyed at this unfriendly welcome. But — thank God — he controls his annoyance and quietly says, "that to which your heart clings is really your God".

Surprisingly one teacher replies and asks, "How do you mean that?" Yes, says the pastor, "Martin Luther said this. 'That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is really your God.' Everybody has a God." The large room is absolutely still, everybody listens to the conversation between the two with astonishment. Since then, he has been involved in good discussions on faith with some of them. Something is changing, he says.

This young man was not ashamed to give testimony to his faith. Thank God, he thought of something good to say. Up to then, these teachers despised those who were Christians. They had learned that it is the human being who is in the center, that only what people do is important. There is no God. Now this young man showed them that they, too, have their gods. Everyone has a god, for everyone has something to which they entrust themselves. For one person it is money, for another their working capacity. For a third their robust health. Everybody needs some-

thing they can rely on when they are gripped by fear.

That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is really your God, said Luther. You must only remember that it needs to be a God who is a help to you in life and in death, and he pointed to Christ.

But how can Christ in our modern world be the power of God?

The good thing about our worldwide Lutheran communion is that we continue to learn from one another.

In 1952 at the Second Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation held in Hanover I experienced how the Norwegian bishop Berggrav, who during the war had courageously stood up against the injustice of the German occupying power, after the war as a friend made us realize that, according to the Lutheran understanding, one has the duty based on the Christian faith to stand up against injustice in the case of state injustices. In this connection, the Lutheran World Federation has time and again stood up for universal human rights, has helped people through its department for World Service. Christ makes us free for such service to the neighbor.

Or, here's a different example. Years ago I was invited to our Lutheran partner church — the Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia. We wanted to drive to a distant congregation in a landrover. We got into the car, but the driver did not drive off. I talked and told stories while the others were silent. I noticed that I was doing something wrong. Then one of the people said to me, "before we drive off we are always silent and say a prayer. We ask Christ to protect our lives on the drive and to save us from hurting any other person by our driving." Then he spoke the prayer before driving, at length in En-

glish, so that I could understand, too. I was deeply moved at the time.

Actually, driving a car is something I do myself. Then I can be proud of the fact that I am a good driver and that I need to keep a clear head and sometimes to react quickly. Yet when I speak such a "prayer before driving" this means: I know that my life is in God's hand whom I know through Christ. I can be confident and relaxed. He will be with me on good and also on bad days. His cross is the sign of divine nearness that cannot be lost.

Indeed, this was the experience of the disciples who were in despair at Jesus' infamous death. The cross was a terrible example of the fact that the life of even the best of human beings is full of fear. If even this Jesus of Nazareth who embodied God's nearness to the marginalized, who called the lame and the blind, the sick and the desperate, at the end could not help but cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" — then how horrible it all was. Then came the beautiful, wonderful Easter morning. They saw the resurrected one and progressively understood: In truth he was not abandoned by God at the cross. Even though he did not feel it himself. No, through him God himself went to those in despair at their guilt and their lives to make them sure of the nearness of God that can never be lost. This death happened for us so that we will no longer at the end be full of fear for ourselves. For this reason, the cross is our comfort. For this reason, those who deep in their hearts trust in the crucified Christ in the light of Easter experience the freedom of a Christian. For this reason, they have less fear for themselves and have their heads and their hands free for others. For this reason, the Gospel is the power of God.

This is something decisive which we keep discovering anew. This is the reason for the joy at this jubilee.

This year we also commemorate the 500th anniversary of Philipp Melanchthon, a friend of Luther's. In accord with Luther, he formulated the Augsburg Confession which was handed over to the emperor Charles V. At times, Melanchthon was in such despair that he cried half the night. Luther who was far away on the Coburg and could not come, because he might have been killed if he did, wrote letters.

To conclude, I will read a letter Luther wrote to Melanchthon on June 27, 1530:

To Philipp Melanchthon,  
the most beloved disciple of  
Christ and Christophorus...  
With all my heart I hate the  
wretched worries that are eating  
you up. That they rule in your  
heart is not the fault of the great  
cause, but of our great unbelief.  
I am also often gripped by fear  
but not permanently. It is your  
philosophy that plagues you so,  
not your theology. As if you  
with your useless works could  
achieve anything. What can the  
devil do more than kill us? What  
else? I entreat you, you who  
otherwise were a fighter in all  
other matters, fight now against  
yourself, your greatest enemy,  
you who hand the devil so  
many weapons against yourself!  
Christ has died for our sins, he is  
alive and ruling. He who be-  
came our father, will also be the  
father of our children. I am zeal-  
ously praying for you, and it  
hurts that you incorrigible leech  
of a worrier make my prayers so  
ineffective. I myself at least am  
not particularly worried about



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our cause — be it from stupidity or due to the Holy Spirit, Christ is to decide — rather more hopeful than I had hoped. God has the power to raise the dead. He also has the power to keep up his cause even when it is falling, and when it has fallen to lift it up again, and when it is standing to continue it. If we do not live up to this, may others take our place. If we are not raised by his

promises, pray, who else then is in the world for whom they would be a concern? But more another time, I'm only carrying water to the ocean. ...May Christ comfort you all through his spirit and strengthen and teach you. ... Amen... your Martinus Luther.

May God give such comfort to all so that we are witnesses of the love of Christ to the world. Amen.

## CLOSING EUCHARIST: SERMON

Agnes Pangyanszky

Text: Colossians 2:6-10.12

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During our preparation for the Assembly and while we were here, we discussed the theme: In Christ — Called to Witness. It touched upon our being in Christ, in our call and in the Christian witness.

We are all enriched and strengthened by having been together and having shared our experiences. We have all shared in the gifts of our celebration, prayer, Bible studies and international exposure. We are already thinking about traveling home: family, friends, congregations are waiting for us. We are already thinking about the articles we are going to write, the presentations we are going to give on this Assembly.

If we had to summarize our experiences here at the Assembly in Hong Kong — we could just maybe add the word sent to our theme:

*In Christ — called and sent to witness.*

When we think of our Christian calling, we then know that it has some consequences. Many stories in the Old, as well as in the New Testament, start with a call — and continue with sending. I would like to put the emphasis on being sent now, because those who are called are sent as well. After his resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples with the words of the Great Commission:

“... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”  
(NIV, Matthew 28:19).



*The Rev. Agnes Pangyanszky  
Student pastor of the Lutheran Church  
in Hungary, Budapest*

We are called and we are sent. We are part of God's plan to be with people, among people — to witness and serve. But as we are called and sent by Christ and as we are in him, we become responsible. We are sent to the peoples of the earth with God's message and it has to be followed up! I remember the words of Jeremiah, who was a young man at the time of his calling. When he had to deliver the message of repentance to his people, he became forever bound to that service:

“... His word is in my heart  
like a fire, a fire shut up in my  
bones. I am weary of holding it  
in; indeed, I cannot” (NIV,  
Jeremiah 20:9).

When we set out on our journeys to return home to be among our people, we should give witness with this fire in our bones.

We learn from the Letter to the Colossians that there was a congregation there whose members were called to be Christians. But their Christian identity was distracted by some contemporary philosophy of life that taught



them about the power in the elements of the world.

They had to be reminded of their Christian call, first of all baptism in which we primarily receive our calling. People very often tend to forget that baptism is not just an important service in the church but it is sharing in the life of Christ. Our lives become renewed lives. Christ unites us and frees us from the bondage of the world — not taking us out of it, not degrading it, but giving us the freedom of the children of God. We are free to share in the life of Christ and we can freely live by Christ and not by the elements of the world.

This is the reason why the Colossians had to be reminded of their call in Christ. Being baptized and Christian does not mean an additional lifestyle. Living in Christ cannot be complemented with any kinds of teaching — because Christianity itself is not merely a teaching, but the gift of God — giving us the fullness of life through Christ.

To be able to fulfill their call in Christ, the Colossians are reminded to become rooted and built in Christ. They no longer need another philosophy of life. There exists no supplementary experience besides the salvation offered in Christ. There are no extra pledges needed besides the promise of God. The Colossians had to be strengthened in their original vocation: in Christ they experience the fullness of God. To live in Christ means being rooted and built in Him.

Christianity has long coped with being rooted in different cultures. Today we find Christians among all peoples of the earth. Today we know how diverse our experiences are, but we could accept and reconcile our diversities to be able to form a Christian communion. This communion is very

promising. It requires Christians who realize their call and are ready to be sent. Sent to the world that has learnt various ways of protection. Be it a nation or culture, politics or economy, people learnt to build their own protective walls. Nationalism, political and economic measures protect only a few. The North-South difference has grown to be a global struggle for survival. I am afraid the costs of openness, tolerance and reconciliation have become too high. We have become too worried to be able to place our lives and our future into one hand — into the hand of God. God is ready and willing to be our protection. We often sing Luther's famous "A mighty fortress is our God," but often we do not remember that the protection God can give us is more enduring than any walls we put up around ourselves!

It is very often experienced that not all generations are equally rooted in the church. If people do not find the church to be a place like "home," it will be impossible to represent the fullness of the communion. If we want to become an inclusive community we have to learn how to empower and give rights to all to participate. Who could feel responsible without having a task? Who could feel at home without being invited? Let us be ever more open to all who seek the way to God! Let us show everyone the door to God — Jesus Himself.

It was important that the Colossians fully understood the reminding words. They had their own contemporary vocabulary and they did not comprehend all former expressions about Christianity. The message had to be formulated in a special way. They would not have been able to grow in Christ without the explanation that was fully true to the original message but was "translated" to suit their way of understanding.



Amidst our thanksgiving, praise and joy we should not forget the painful reality of our world. God listens to the cries of the world and he opens up our eyes and ears to see and hear. We are called and sent — to serve among people. We can never give up the efforts to be the first to serve the needy. We are not only sent but urged by God to identify, address and give help in all cases of human tragedy, injustice and violence.

But seeing all the responsibility involved in this immense task, who will dare to start out? We know how little can be achieved by our poor human efforts only. Anyone can ask: what is the proof of our witness then? How will people know that we witness Christ in our lives and in our deeds?

If we experience that God has heard our cries, we will be able to listen to the cries of others.

If we have been helped by God, we will know how to help people.

If we have been able to turn to God for forgiveness, we can forgive others.

If God has ever consoled us, we can console people in despair.

If we know how Jesus shared the life of humans, we will be able to share and participate in the lives of our fellow human beings.

If God has taught us, we can teach others.

If we see how dynamically God seeks the relationship with us, we will be able to lead dynamic and fruitful lives.

If God has ever had joy in us, we can rejoice fully in the communion.

We should never forget that our lives and the life of our churches always point to God. The proof of our witness is not in us, but it is fully in Him. We witness our faith in God, we witness His fullness and His coherence to all peoples of the earth.

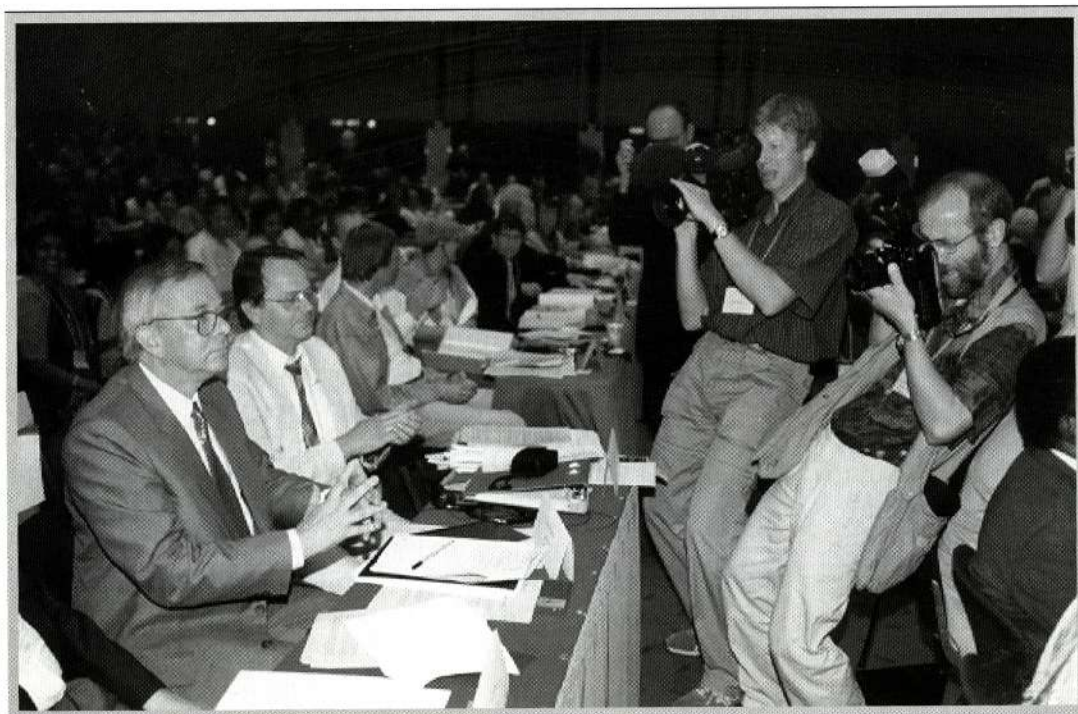
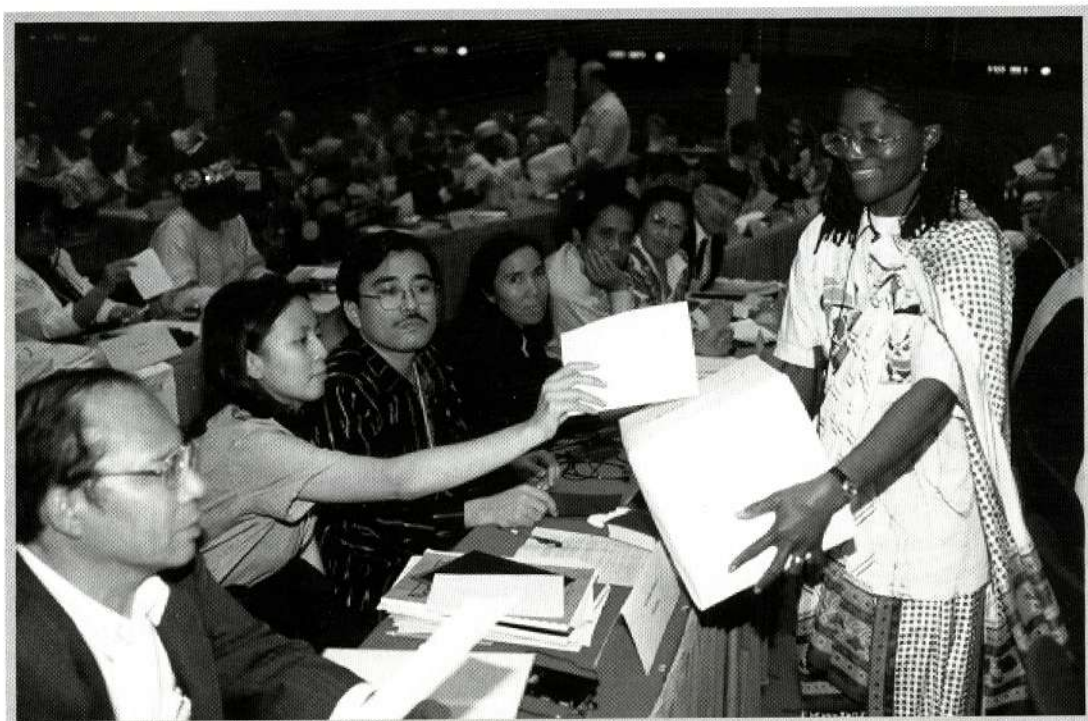
We witness God who is the God of history as well. The next millennium is just a step ahead. A lot of excitement and fear precedes the year 2000. We know that there have been many historical turning points in the course of history. Many brought about important changes for humankind and many have been very demanding for people. What else could be possible than even in this rapidly changing world we put our lives into the hand of God? We accept that our future will be according to His will and we continue our journeys as He entrusts us to do. Too many people in history have been excluded from being able to lead fully human lives, but if even one suffers, help and consolation must remain the first on our present and future agenda.

Participants at this Assembly in Hong Kong have taken decisions and have decided about the direction the Lutheran World Federation is going to follow in the next seven, fifty or hundred years in front of us. New issues emerged, new needs were identified, new actions were taken. But all our discussions, actions and hopes are enfolded in one vision: our common history as Christians and Lutherans strengthens us and it always serves us as the source of witness. Because we know how God had been with us in this common past, we are not afraid of looking ahead into the future. We should see our common future as a challenge from God, in that He will give us new possibilities, new chances to seek Him and fulfill our Christian vocation.

He has called us to be here to give witness and to be strengthened in our calling: let us go now with the fire shut up in our bones to proclaim the hope of the future that God has given us abundantly in Jesus Christ Himself.

Amen.





## THE LWF COUNCIL AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



*Dr Gottfried Brakemeier, the President of the LWF from 1990-1997, congratulates his successor Bishop Christian Krause (left) after the election.*



## LWF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

*The Assembly elected the LWF President and 48 members of the Council for the period until the Tenth Assembly*

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Female from Canada (to be nominated in 1998)

## EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE





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Be it resolved that the Assembly adopts the following expression of gratitude:

- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened in Hong Kong, expresses its gratitude to the following persons and organizations for their part in making this Assembly a meaningful and important event in the life of the LWF and the lives of those who participated in the Assembly:
  - To the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Honourable Tung Chee-hwa, who brought greetings to the Assembly, and to the officials and their co-workers who welcomed the Assembly participants and extended the hospitality of the city. The Assembly acknowledges the generous assistance of the Hong Kong Immigration Department and the Hong Kong Tourist Association.
  - To the management and staff of the Hong Kong Conference and Exhibition Centre and the Wanchai Hsin Kuang Restaurant. In addition, we note the comfortable accommodations provided to the participants, mainly by the YMCA of Hong Kong. A special word of gratitude is addressed to Mr. Patrick Cheung, the General Secretary of the Hong Kong Chinese YMCA.
  - To our generous hosts, the Hong Kong Lutheran Federation (HKLF), its chairperson, the Rev. Josephine Tso Shui-Wan, and the member churches of the HKLF for their warm hospitality and hard work.
  - To the member churches in Hong Kong who welcomed the participants to attend worship services in their congregations and offered a sumptuous dinner and lively presentation about the life of the host churches.
  - To the chairperson of the local preparatory committee, the Rev. Dr. Lam Tak-ho, and the local Assembly Coordinator, Mr. Lee Ge Keen, as well as the hard-working and efficient staff of the local committee and its many volunteers ("the yellow angels"). A special word of appreciation to all those who made the Women's Room a place of true encounter and to Thomas Tsang, Ronald Lee (Tale Kwong) and Mabel Wu for their untiring efforts and hard work.
  - To the member churches, national committees, related agencies and mission societies for contributing to the Assembly budget, and to Lutheran Brotherhood, Raptim Voyages, the Oak Foundation, La Genevoise Vie, Northern Insurance, Banque Edouard Constant, Banque Cantonale de Genève and Lloyd's Bank for their generous contributions towards the 50th anniversary celebration of the Lutheran World Federation.

- To the member churches and the China Christian Council which prepared the excellent visitation programs before and after the Assembly, as well as those who made the travel arrangements.
- To the Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the LWF, particular appreciation is expressed. Dr. Noko has served with skill and dedication, with loyalty to the Federation and its constituency since his election in 1994. He took up the insights of the Eighth Assembly in Curitiba and carried out its decisions. His tireless commitment to the manifold interests of the Lutheran World Federation merits our particular appreciation. We note with special gratitude his skilful negotiations related to and preparations for this Assembly. We also thank the Deputy General Secretary, Agneta Ucko, and the Assembly Coordinator, Yvonne Dahlin, for the able guidance and direction they provided.
- To the Assembly Coordinators for Worship, Content, Communication and Finance, for the pre-Assemblies and the Bible studies as well as the staff, co-opted staff and many others from the member churches who have unselfishly given their time and efforts to the Assembly. Many persons have worked long and hard, but always cheerfully, to assist in making the Assembly function efficiently. A special word of thanks goes to the stewards for their great service. Particular gratitude is expressed to the language service, the interpreters, the translators, the editor and staff of *Hong Kong Highlights* and the technical service for their continuous efforts to enable communication among the Assembly participants.
- The Assembly wishes to thank the group of international worship facilitators who planned and carried out the spirit-filled worship services which beautifully blended newer and traditional styles of music. We are indebted to I-to Loh for composing the Assembly hymn and for being the Music Director, and to Mabel Wu for her imaginative direction of the Joint Lutheran Choir at the festive eucharistic celebration. The gathering of people from all over the world in the opening service made a lasting impression of our unity. We also thank the preachers: Rev. Josephine Tso Shui-Wan at the opening service, Bishop Horst Hirschler at the 50th anniversary Eucharist, and Rev. Agnes Panyanszky at the closing service. We also express thanks to the Copenhagen Boys Choir and to the Ludwigsburger Brass Quintet for music throughout the Assembly.
- Appreciation is expressed to Dr. He Qi for his art work which hung in the Assembly hall and appeared in the official poster.



- The Assembly expresses its deep gratitude to Dr. Choong Chee Pang, the keynote speaker, as well as those who offered regional voices, Dr. Sigrun Mogedal and Mr. Lazarus Nickey Gaseb, and those who made contributions through thematic presentations, Bishop Christoph Stier, His Eminence Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, Bishop H. George Anderson, Dr. Kunchala Rajaratnam, Mr. Upasaka Ko Ping-yip, the Rev. Dr. Paul Martinson, Archbishop David Windibiziri and Dr. Eva Man Kit.
- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened at Hong Kong, expresses its profound appreciation and thanks to God for the service and presence of Gottfried Brakemeier, President of the Lutheran World Federation. Dr. Brakemeier's leadership and witness during the past seven years have been an inspiration to us all. His competence, experience and insight have guided the LWF through a period marked by increasing disparities between the rich and the poor and by the ever-growing need for reconciliation and unity within the church.
- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened at Hong Kong, expresses its gratitude for the work of the LWF Executive Committee, the Council, and its various committees since the Eighth Assembly. The Assembly at Curitiba took many actions that required the attention and action of the Council. The Council has faithfully carried out those resolutions and statements. The members of the Council and its Committees have diligently executed their tasks, including providing helpful resources and assistance to the member churches. Our profound appreciation is extended to all these persons who have served during the past seven years.
- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened at Hong Kong, expresses its appreciation for the many greetings extended to the Assembly by representatives of other religious communities. We note those provided by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Hong Kong Christian Council, the China Christian Council, the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, the United Bible Societies, and the World Association for Christian Communication.
- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened at Hong Kong, expresses its thanks to the large number of representatives of the press, radio and television who have extensively covered and reported on the activities of this Assembly. These representatives have assisted in communicating to the world the role of the Lutheran World Federation in the affairs of churches and nations.

- This Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, convened at Hong Kong, recognizes that there are many other persons and organizations who have been involved in the preparation, planning and functioning of this Assembly. Although unnamed, their contributions are not unnoticed, and our hearty thanks are extended to them.
- This Assembly recalls and gives thanks to God for the life and witness of its recently departed former General Secretary, Dr. Carl H. Mau, Jr. The Assembly was honoured by the presence of some of its "elders" on whose wisdom and guidance it was able to rely and will wish to count in the future. We rejoice in having former General Secretaries André Appel and Gunnar Staalsett among us.
- And this Assembly remembers with gratitude the founding members of the Lutheran World Federation who, with vision and courage, called into life the Federation.
- Beyond this expression, we thank God for the many blessings bestowed upon this Assembly.





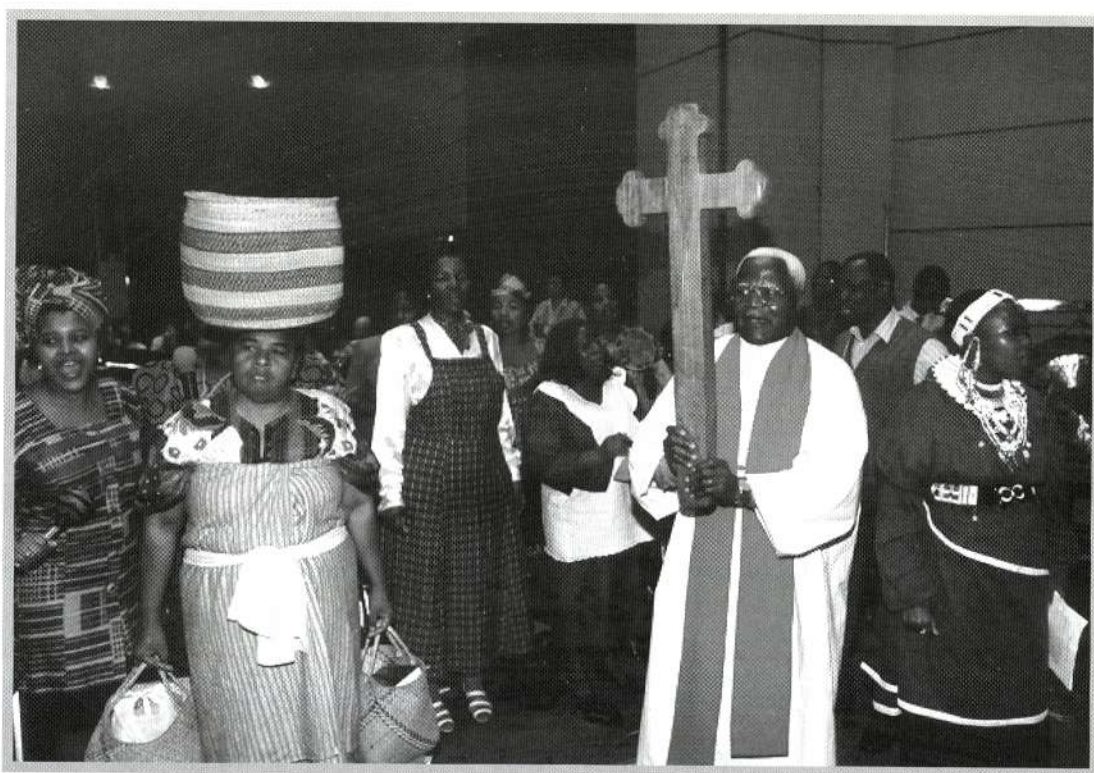


## GLIMPSES FROM THE ASSEMBLY

*The Assembly program included important and fascinating elements that do not appear in the text of this official report.*

*This is the case with the Opening Eucharist, the Bible Study presentations, prepared by the churches on all regions, which made a deep impact on each day's work. The Hong Kong Lutheran churches which hosted the Assembly presented their history and activities in a most creative way. A few photo pages have been put together to illustrate the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the LWF on 13 July which began with a festive Sunday Eucharist and was followed by a joyful celebration entitled "Cloud of Witnesses".*

*These pages intend to give a visual impression of these important events at the LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong.*



*Every morning the Assembly participated in the cultural and contextual reading of the Bible, presented by churches on each region.*



*The Assembly was opened with a  
eucharistic worship on July 8*





*Bible Study Presentations*







*The four LWF member churches in Hong Kong and their umbrella organization, the Hong Kong Lutheran Federation, introduced themselves to the Assembly participants in the course of a colorful evening of drama, dance, song and storytelling, culminating in a festive 12-course Chinese dinner.*



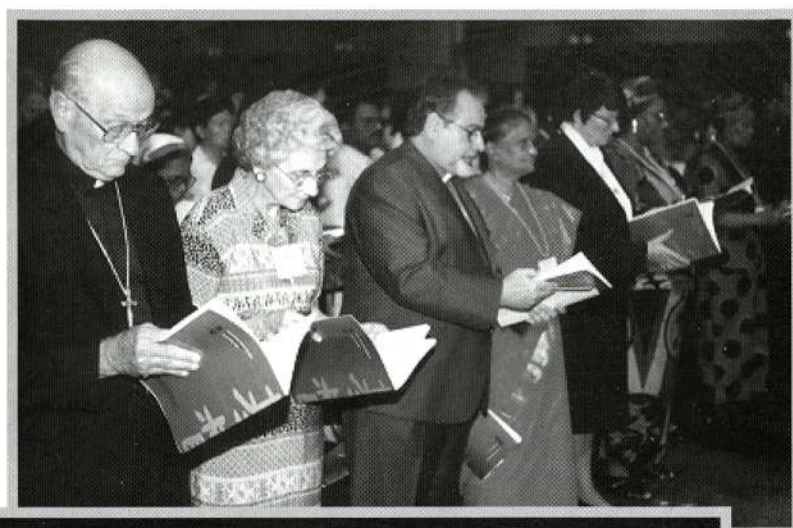




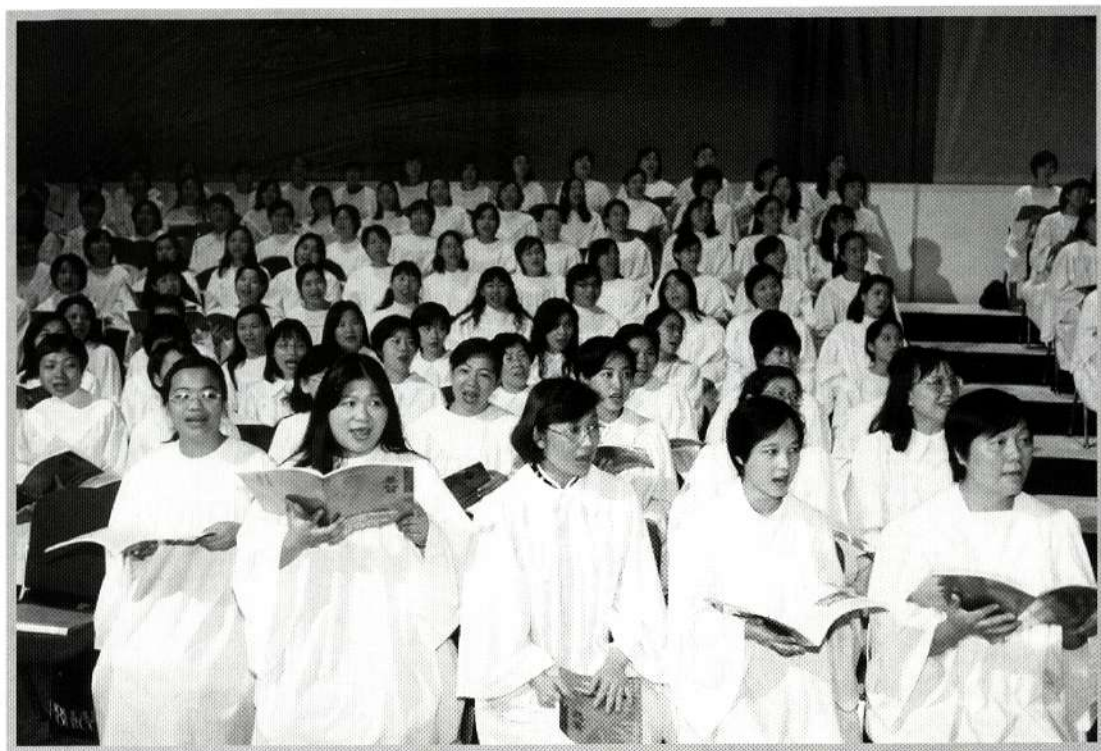


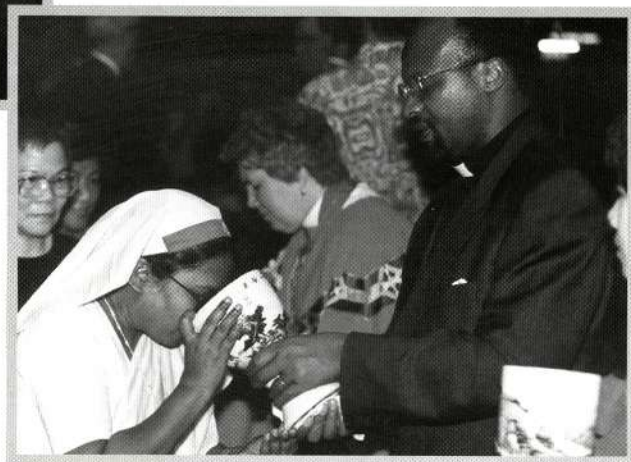
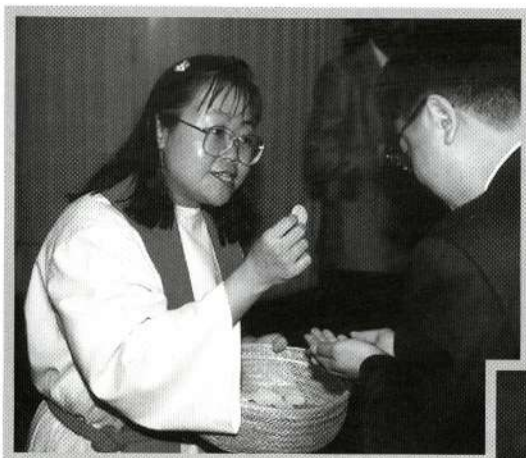
*The 50th anniversary of the LWF was celebrated with a eucharistic service in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre and was attended by about 5,000 people. Worshippers celebrated the past assemblies held during the LWF's 50 years with a Litany of Thanksgiving, and looked to the future in their prayers. A 380-voice choir of Hong Kong Lutherans, the Copenhagen Boys' Choir, the Ludwigsburg Brass Quintet from Germany assisted, as well as musicians playing traditional Chinese instruments.*



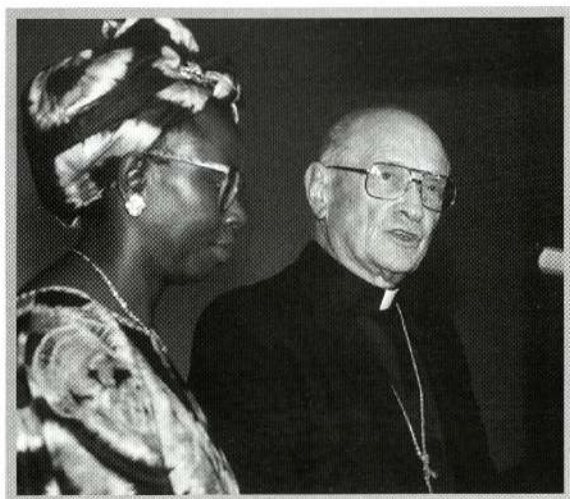




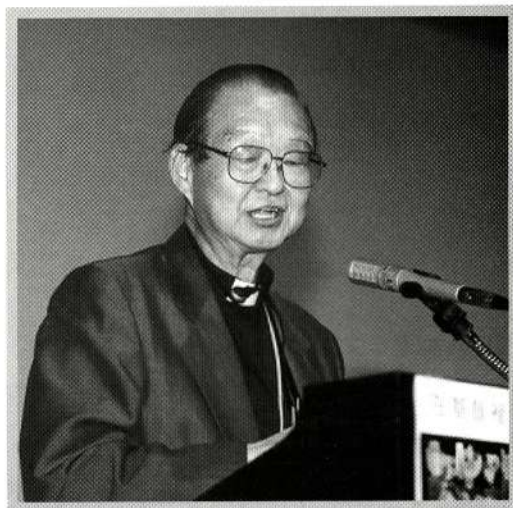


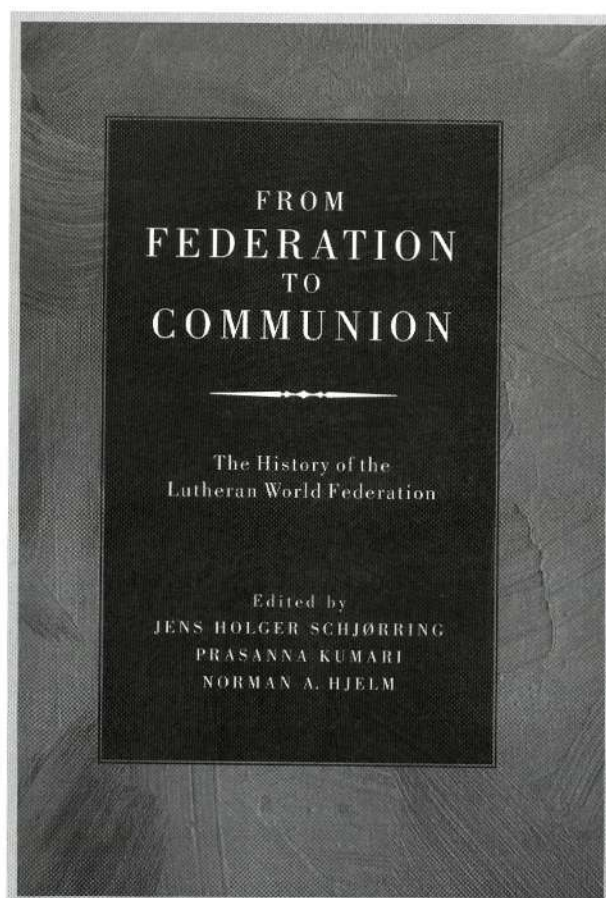






*The 50th anniversary jubilee evening, "A Cloud of Witnesses", was a journey through the history of the LWF. As part of the celebrations, the 50-year history of the Federation with the title "From Federation to Communion" was introduced to the participants.*







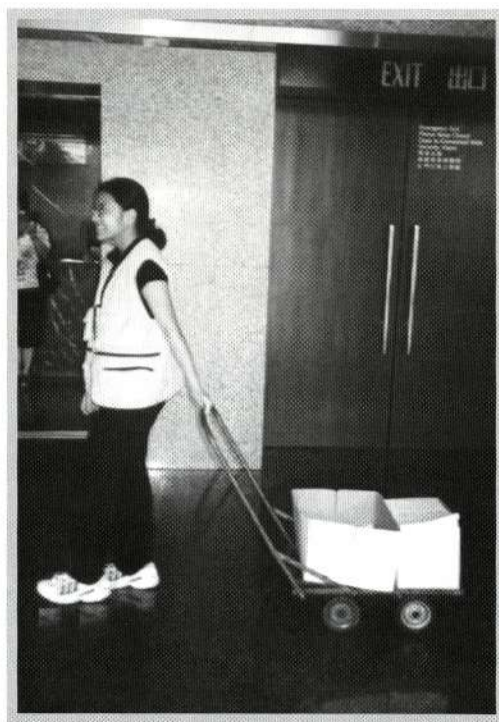


*Meals were taken in the Wanchai Restaurant*





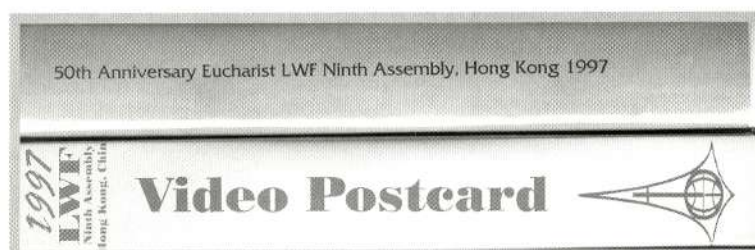
*The local volunteers,  
the "Golden Angels",  
assisting behind the  
scene*



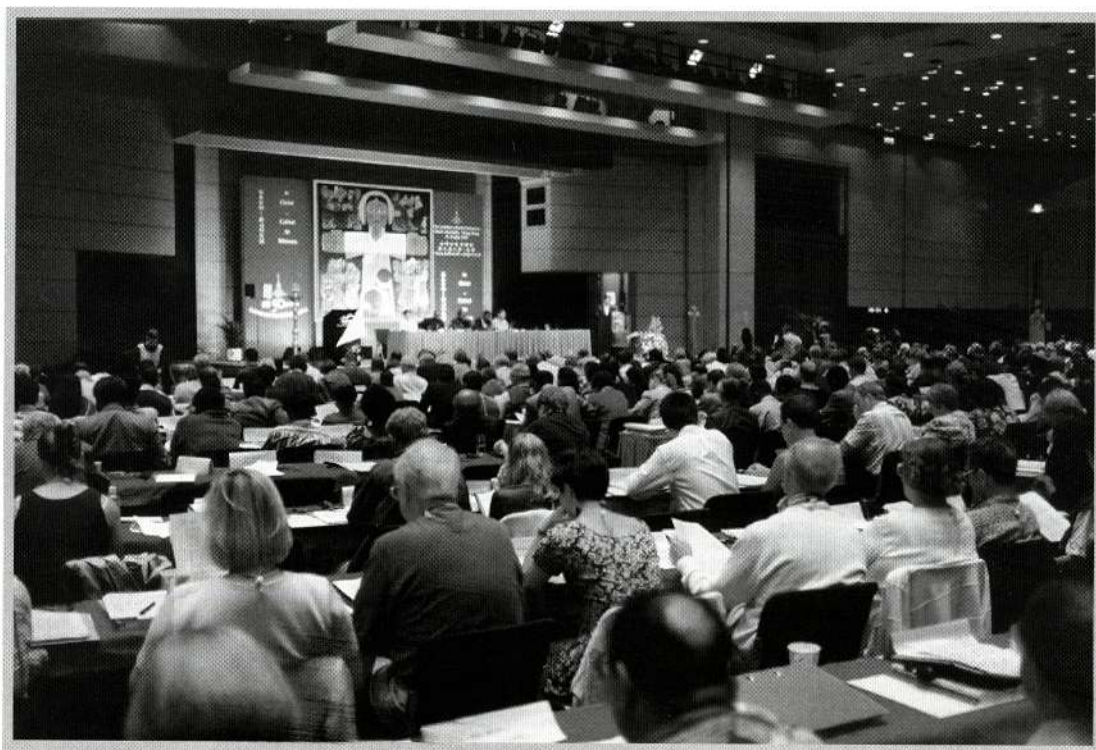




*A video postcard was produced on the highlights of the Assembly*



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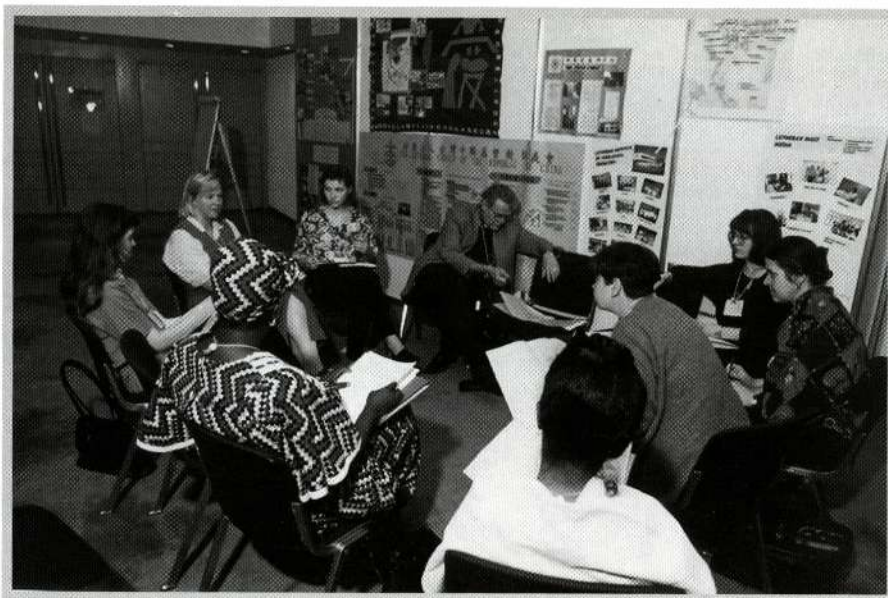
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The Lutheran World Federation

**Ninth Assembly**

Hong Kong 1997

**Report**

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In Christ — Called to Witness

Assembly Report

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